

SYMPATHY FOR THE ORCS:
EVIL IN URBAN FANTASY LITERATURE

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that urban fantasy—fantasy set in cities—has a more nuanced conception of evil than high fantasy, which favours pastoral settings, and which was heavily influenced by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. Tolkien wrote his Lord of the Rings trilogy in part as a critique of the effect of industrialism on the English countryside and on human lives in general. His work has been so influential that the effect has been an anti-urban tradition in high fantasy, and his portrayal of absolute good versus absolute evil has carried forward into many other fantasy works. The factors that create compelling and satisfying stories do not necessarily reflect or shed light on human behaviour, and it is useful to be able to distinguish what Robert Ellwood calls moral evil and mythical evil, and to understand when each is being deployed, to what end.

The urban fantasy genre arose in the early 1980s, and derives from its setting a greater level of comfort with multiplicity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. In short, the urban setting itself affects how evil is portrayed. This argument is supported with close reading and content analysis of twenty-four novels by four authors of urban fantasy: Charles de Lint, Mercedes Lackey, Kelley Armstrong, and China Miéville. My analysis asks about the nature and source of evil in each text, the values that are associated with evil and set in opposition to it, the text's handling of moral and mythical evil, and the role of the urban landscape.

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Foreword

The dissertation that you see before you is the result of over a decade of work. Using novels by Charles de Lint, Mercedes Lackey, Kelley Armstrong, and China Miéville, I believe that I've demonstrated a tendency in urban fantasy fiction towards more complex villains, as opposed to high fantasy, where evil is often a mythic construct whose minions inhabit evil geography and possess evil biology.

I've always been interested in the stories that we tell ourselves and the patterns we use to make sense of our lives--in popular culture and popular media as myth, you might say. Around 2007, I grew interested in the ways in which kind, friendly, intelligent people, acting in good faith, could use narrative to justify beliefs and behaviour that to me seemed the antithesis of kindness and friendliness and intelligence and good faith. I started out, in my course work, looking at a religious community, at its cultivation of polarized thinking, of the concept of pollution, and of right and wrong existing on a cosmic level. But I had also seen the rise of this kind of thinking in mainstream media very recently, in the discourse surrounding 9/11. I had taken it for granted that Western politicians sometimes found it useful to sound like kings or wizards giving inspirational speeches to the troops in a fantasy novel. Now I started to pay critical attention to how fantasy structured its villains. In an online conversation about Charles de Lint, I realized that de Lint's villains were very different from Torak, from Sauron, from Rakoth Maugrim, even from Voldemort. De Lint was making a clear effort to align them very closely with a certain moral scheme, and it was clear to me that that scheme was fairly consistent across books, but that it also developed over time. The more I thought about it, and the more widely I read, the more I was certain that I was looking at a difference of genre.

The first stage was amassing background material. I read a great deal on the history and theory of fantasy, on myth, and on evil. Although I first confined my readings on evil to ethics and myth, I was encouraged to explore other fields, and in some cases these explorations did prove to be fruitful.

One research venture that was not strictly necessary, but still fun and useful, was a couple of trips to the UK in 2010 and 2011. I wanted to find out what Tolkien was writing against: I wanted to find out about Mordor. To this end, I toured former industrial areas and industrial museums, including the Black Country Living Museum, the Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industry, Manchester's Museum of Science and Industry, and Geevor Tin Mine in Cornwall, as well as Oxford University and Sarehole Mill, which had apparently loomed large in Tolkien's mind when he conceived of the Shire. The industries themselves were no longer operational, and to my mingled chagrin and delight the passage of time had made them picturesque, but the museums were invaluable in showing me first of all archival footage and photographs of the land had looked like at the height of England's industrial production, and secondly, giving me a sense of the human lives involved. I am sure that Tolkien fully recognized the humanity of the people who worked in the Black Country, but when he populated his own Black Country, he did so with orcs. It shouldn't have been a surprise, but it was, to tour the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley and step into Pitt's Cottage, built with secondhand bricks, and find a charming and well kept space, the shelves adorned with doilies cut out of newspaper. The people who lived there worked long hours at gruelling jobs, they didn't have a lot, and what they did have would have been covered with soot, but they did whatever they could to make their home beautiful and comfortable. I'm not saying that the lack of newspaper doilies in Mordor is a

flaw in Tolkien's work, but it is an aspect of life that got lost in translation to the fantastic, and I think that interesting things happen when you reintroduce it.

Which brings me to my analyses of urban fantasy. I suspected that the urbanness of urban fantasy, the coexistence of many kinds of people, the inability to draw clear boundaries, the necessity of fitting fantastic characters into a world of coffee shops and subway delays, had something to do with the more nuanced portrayals of villains.

Confining my search to books published in English--partly because it is the language I am most comfortable in and partly because the kind of fantasy literature I am talking about seems to be predominantly an English-language phenomenon--I assembled a collection of authors who had fairly large bodies of work that I thought represented a range of kinds of urban fantasy. Lackey and de Lint were authors whose work I knew well and thought I could get a lot of mileage from. Armstrong I wanted because her books seemed to me to be examples of the kind of urban fantasy previously known as supernatural romance--in fact, it was Armstrong herself, in a reading at the Toronto Public Library, who told me that it had been supernatural romance. Finally, China Miéville kept coming up in my background reading, and I knew that I wanted an example of immersive fantasy; and when I did read his work, I knew there would be a lot for me to work with.

I chose to restrict myself to book-length works, because I wanted stories with room for developed antagonists, and where possible, I aimed for breadth and variety. So, for example, I limited the number of entries in any one series by Mercedes Lackey, because in most cases, multiple entries wouldn't add new information or insight; and with one exception, in Armstrong's series I avoided repeat protagonists. I was also constrained by what books were available to me through the library system at the time.

My books selected, I asked where in these works the authors located evil, and where they located good. Whether, and how, they shaped the world they had invented to conform to their moral scheme. How their work changed over time. To summarize, I found that the moral scheme of Charles de Lint's work made little use of evil, and over time worked to complicate and add nuance to the things marked as recurring sources of antagonism, but it did prize the forging of healthy connections, and used magic to make those connections explicit. Mercedes Lackey argued for the preservation of evil as a category, but her work had to continually keep pushing evil back and making it more complicated in order to fit into the urban world. Kelley Armstrong's books occasionally involved moral monstrosities, but first and foremost they were very ambivalent about systems, and concerned with how the interplay of those systems could cause or facilitate harm, while at the same time Armstrong showed protagonists using diverse networks of affinity to help work through dilemmas and complex moral reasoning. Finally, China Miéville engaged with evil only playfully, but his work was very critical of systems of government, and especially the marriage of government and commercial interests; and the way to do good in his books was to ask critical questions and to recognize the personhood of others.

A couple of the things I found surprised me. One of them--and now that I've seen it I can't unsee it--is Mercedes Lackey's focus on policing and on eternal vigilance. On the one hand, I find that I can't enjoy her work just for fun anymore. On the other, this realization has served as a springboard for what I hope will be my next project, an examination of the cultivation of fear in American fantastic literature. For this I plan to continue using Lackey's fiction, as well as the work of Ted Dekker, Bentley Little, and Octavia Butler.

But the thing that surprised me most about my findings was the degree to which the philosophers I looked to as an authority on evil resorted to fictional examples. I said this several times in the dissertation itself, but I'll repeat it here: I don't think that the elements that make stories good and interesting necessarily arise out of genuine insight into what makes human beings hurt each other. Making sense of tragedy and loss is in part a narrative process, but justifying harm and exclusion, and creating heroes, are also narrative processes. I think it's a good idea to be very clear about which one a text is aiming for, to measure that against our own experiences of the world, to consider what kind of authority the author is claiming or being granted, and to bear in mind that what is satisfying or entertaining is not always a just or accurate representation of real life.

Being critical about our deployment of the concept of evil is extremely important right now in particular, in the wake of the rise of so many far-right movements globally. These movements are rooted in anger, thwarted entitlement, and desperation--a sense that the world needs to be put back on track, returned to a golden age when boundaries were clear and all good people agreed, by strong and decisive figures who have no patience for subtlety or compromise.

I know there are people who find evil to be a useful idea, as an extreme term of condemnation that is nevertheless a nuanced and complex thing of which all humans are capable without diminishing their humanity. However, the most popular use of the concept of evil removes people from the realm of rational humanity. As I have said, I agree with Philip Cole that the most dangerous people believe that they're stamping evil out, and that the innocent people they harm are either themselves complicit in the evil they see around them, or a tragic but necessary sacrifice for the cause of good. A response that I have seen--

and to some extent playfully participated in--is the crowning of new monsters, new Dark Lords. I have seen people say that those who partake of these movements have relinquished their humanity, that those who refuse to recognize the personhood of others do not themselves deserve personhood, or the rights that we have agreed should accompany personhood. But that simply makes human rights conditional on people's allegiances, when the problem is the idea that human rights can be conditional at all. A disability rights activist who blogs under the name skye-writing has pointed out, we can't just pass the unperson ball; we have to deflate it.¹ And part of that, I think, means creating new stories and new patterns, and paying careful critical attention to how and why we craft our dragons.

¹ skye-writing, "my anti-ableism will be full of weirdos or it will be bullsh**," *beginning our dissent*, 20 May 2016, 4 January 2018, <http://skye-writing.tumblr.com/post/144653521168/my-anti-ableism-will-be-full-of-weirdos-or-it-will>.

Chapter 1: Introduction: Fantastic Maps, Evil Territories

This dissertation will show that urban fantasy fiction--set in cities--has a more nuanced conception of evil than “high” fantasy, which favours pastoral settings, and often depicts secondary worlds in which evil has its own discrete realm. The latter draws heavily on the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, who wrote in a very particular context, in response to specific concerns he had about his own world. Tolkien’s work was so influential that his scheme of absolute good versus absolute evil has carried forward into many other fantasy works, even when the authors are working in drastically different contexts.

Urban fantasy, which arose as a genre in the early 1980s, derives from its setting a greater level of comfort with multiplicity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Alan Blum, in his *The Imaginative Structures of the City*, points out that cities are engaged in a continual process of negotiating their identity and becoming themselves, an environment far less hospitable to notions of simple and monolithic good and evil. I will also draw on William Cronon’s “The Trouble with Wilderness: Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” and Frederick Reenstjernja’s “Paradise or Purgatory: The City in French and British Children’s Literature” to show how high fantasy has, through Tolkien, embraced an anti-urban tradition, and to pinpoint the reasons why this is problematic, the nature of urban fantasy’s response to it, and the effect that this has on the portrayal of evil in both genres. I will conclude by examining the work of four authors of urban fantasy: Charles de Lint, Mercedes Lackey, Kelley Armstrong, and China Miéville.

My methodology will concentrate principally on close reading and content analysis of the texts themselves. I will ask of them: What--according to the text--is evil here? What

is the source of evil? What values are associated with it, or set in opposition to it? How does the work link, decouple, or complicate its portrayals of moral evil and mythical evil, and what are the implications? How might the work's cultural context have influenced its depiction of evil? How is the urban landscape put to use? A small amount of historical and biographical information will bolster parts of my argument. Writing is not done in a vacuum, and the development of the genre and its values are part of a dialogue with audiences, other authors, and the culture at large.

The authors I have chosen all have substantial bodies of work that qualify as urban fantasy, including multiple works set in a certain fictionalized version of reality, enabling them to explore worlds and characters as fully as possible. In addition, these authors represent four different positions in urban fantasy. Charles de Lint is one of the pioneers of the genre, whose work has developed and adapted to new circumstances and information. Mercedes Lackey is a slightly later entrant, a popular and very prolific writer (who also works in high fantasy and science fiction) who created a number of loosely linked urban fantasy series in the 1990s, and then returned to that world after 9/11. Lackey has also made forays into historical urban fantasy. Kelley Armstrong's work represents a relatively new subgenre that is currently being marketed as urban fantasy, that deals with vampires, werewolves, witches, and other supernatural character types living in the human world.² Finally, China Miéville is a much celebrated writer whose urban fantasies include examples of what Farah Mendlesohn calls immersive fantasy.

All four of these authors have bodies of work that extend beyond what a dissertation of this size can be expected to handle. Therefore, I have narrowed my scope to

² That the subgenre is being marketed as urban fantasy is new; the subgenre itself, however, is older than urban fantasy.

six novels by each author. Although the criteria used for narrowing them down varied by author, factors included iconic status of each text, the centrality of the city to the plot, the text's contribution to the moral landscape of the world it depicts, the form (I chose to restrict the study to full-length novels), the breadth the selections represent in relation to the author's work, and accessibility. With this in mind, I caution that my conclusions may be challenged by other entries that I have excluded, or works that have not yet, at the time I write this, been published.

Fantasy

It would be a mistake to attempt to locate a certain, single, indisputable origin for English-language genre fantasy, and even the history outlined in the next chapter is a gross oversimplification, but it is possible to trace shapes and tendencies. In my own understanding and for the purposes of this study, fantasy, at least in English, is a genre--as opposed to a mode--that arose out of the mingled strands of the Gothic novel, the fairy tale, and the romance, and that combines a post-Enlightenment Western perspective with magic and the supernatural, using a register of wonder more than terror. In fantasy, magic and the supernatural are positioned as violations of the reader's own understanding of the world. If the stories are written for pre-Enlightenment readers, they might rather be called romances under the current scheme. If they privilege a non-Western perspective that posits the presence of the supernatural, often as a challenge to rationalism or colonialism, then the work is more accurately described as magic realism. And if the predominant register, particularly as it pertains to the supernatural, is one of terror rather than wonder,

then the work is more likely a work of horror.³ All of these genres may be said to fit into the fantastic *mode*, but they are not, to my understanding, part of the fantasy *genre*.

However, I do not assert that mine is the best or only understanding of fantasy.

John Cawelti's 1976 book *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, although it does not treat fantasy specifically, argues for the artistic merit of even the most formulaic of genre fiction. Even though Brian Attebery's study of fantasy still grants the fantasy formula comparatively little artistic merit⁴, formula, Cawelti argues, provides a scaffolding for the artist to work in, and in addition to the other criteria by which works of fiction are evaluated, the artist must also negotiate the tension between adherence to the formula and innovation.⁵ He argues that while "the traditional proposition" is "that the greatest artists are ultimately known by transcending their times," "to effectively and imaginatively speak the common wisdom of one's times, while perhaps not the artist's highest obligation, is an important cultural function."⁶ He shows how other genres such as the mystery, the hard-boiled detective story, the gangster novel, and the western articulate anxieties and synthesize contradictory values and perspectives. It is worthwhile to point out that two of the poles that recur in all these genres are the urban and the pastoral.

³ It has been pointed out to me that a great deal of what is currently called urban fantasy involves types of people and creatures who are staples of horror fiction--the vampire, the werewolf, the demon, and so forth. The register, though, is still different: urban fantasy treats them sympathetically, while horror depicts them as monstrous. Even in fantasies where they are thoroughly monstrous, their presence is counterbalanced by the presence of other supernatural creatures, people, or situations that evoke wonder. For example, Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks*, in which the horrors of the Unseelie Court are balanced by the beautiful Seelie Court and the witty and compassionate phouka, is a fantasy, while Raymond E. Feist's *Faerie Tale*, in which the faeries are thoroughly amoral, disruptive, and inhuman, is a horror novel.

⁴ He calls it "a form of popular escapist literature that combines stock characters and devices--wizards, dragons, magic swords, and the like--into a predictable plot in which the perennially understaffed forces of good triumph over a monolithic evil" and "a mass-produced supplier of wish fulfillment" (Attebery, 1).

⁵ John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 7.

⁶ Ibid. 287.

Cawelti introduces the notion of *moral* fantasy, whereby the dominant moral code of the culture in which a work has been produced is reinforced, in the fictional world, by rewarding the characters who abide by it and punishing those who do not. In other words, a moral fantasy takes place in what the author and intended audience understand to be a just universe. There might be nothing else fantastic about a moral fantasy: Cawelti uses the example of Irving Wallace, who uses meticulously researched real-world settings in his novels.⁷ On the other hand, Tolkien, in including the concept of the eucatastrophe in his definition of fantasy, argues that a happy ending is a structural necessity for fantasy, and as I will show, Tolkien's ideas about fantasy carry much weight. Cawelti's confidence that the study of formulae would eventually lead to a comprehensive picture of culture, useful to and augmented by the findings of sociologists and anthropologists, is a bit overambitious, but the contribution that he makes is extremely valuable.

Brian Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy*, from 1993, adopts George Lakoff's and Mark Johnson's strategy of envisioning of genres as fuzzy sets, which in turn is based on Eleanor Rosch's work on prototype theory and the psychology of classification.⁸ Attebery, like Irwin, distinguishes between the fantastic and fantasy: the fantastic as a mode of storytelling incorporates the whole of myth, fairy tale, magic realism, horror, science fiction, weird fiction, and many kinds of poetry and drama, throughout the known history of humankind.⁹ The Epic of Gilgamesh is arguably written in the fantastic mode. So is

⁷ Ibid. 286.

⁸ Prototype theory states that human beings categorize things and events based on their resemblance to prototypical representatives of the categories available. (Eleanor Rosch, "Principles of Categorization," *Cognition and Categorization*, eds., Eleanor Rosch and Barbara B. Lloyd, [Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1978], 27-48.) In Attebery's work, the prototype would be the centre of the fuzzy set.

⁹ Objections have been raised to the inclusion of myth with the fantastic, on the grounds that myth is believed by the cultures that produce it to be literally true. Judith Kerman has raised the idea that claiming certain texts for the fantastic is a colonial enterprise that assumes audiences from other times, places, and cultures all

William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*. As Attebery points out, "a term broad enough to include both *Conan the Barbarian* and *Cosmicomics* threatens to become meaningless."¹⁰ He therefore finds it useful to distinguish between the fantastic as a mode, and fantasy as a genre. He also introduces the idea of a further level of classification:

Some writers seem to be so intimidated by the potential anarchy of the fantastic, so eager for a guaranteed response, that they retreat to the opposite extreme, which results in the predictability of formula. Borrowing from Tolkien and from Disney, they have produced a rigid pattern of setting, character, and plot comparable to the formulas for the detective novel, the Western, and the women's romance. Like these other popular forms, the fantasy formula, sometimes called *swords-and-sorcery*, can be used to generate lively, ingenious, highly entertaining variations on a limited theme. Like them, it represents 'a synthesis of cultural symbols, themes, and myths with more universal story archetypes' (Cawelti 33) and hence may be analyzed to reveal widespread cultural values and assumptions.

One appeal of formula fiction is that it can constitute a sort of game or pastime. The skilled author, an Agatha Christie or a Mary Stewart, plays by the rules but finds the loopholes in them. It is not the literariness of a formula story that

share the same consensual reality. (Kerman, 181.) However, as Paul Veyne points out, "belief" itself means different things in different time periods and cultures. Moreover, myth by definition is removed from the workaday world, and one would be hard-pressed to find an example of traditional myth in Western culture that is *not* set in a distant past or a far-off land, the meat of the issue being that circumstances then or there are different from those here and now. The overall shape of the fantastic in myth may be different from that in fantasy, and care should be taken to pay attention to what cultures say about their own texts, and to avoid treating all instances of the fantastic like genre fantasy, but I am satisfied that the fantastic is the appropriate mode in which to situate myth.

¹⁰ Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 1.

determines its success but the degree to which it makes the predictable seem fresh and unexpected.¹¹

These myths are part of what I will analyze.¹²

Attebery's scheme is extremely useful, and brings theories of the fantasy genre in line with theories of genre in general. Alastair Fowler writes, "The taxonomic problem largely disappears if we think in terms of continuous generic development."¹³ He also notes that this development is culturally mediated, saying, "In literature, the basis of resemblance lies in literary tradition. What produces generic resemblances, reflection soon shows, is tradition: a sequence of influence and imitation and inherited codes connecting works in a genre."¹⁴ Moreover, locating a work in a given genre is not only the job of the writer or critic, but that of the reader as well.¹⁵ The fuzzy set theory of genre defers to a culture's own sense of what texts should be connected, leaving room for disagreements and for changes over time and across communities, and short-circuiting discussions of what constitutes "real fantasy" or "good fantasy." In practical terms, the fuzzy set theory means that the fantasy genre is what readers, authors, critics, and marketing departments of that time and place understand it to be. A work belongs to the fantasy genre to the degree that people think it does, with works typical of the genre closer to the centre, and the outliers further out. Works can shift the centre of the fuzzy set, as did the Lord of the Rings trilogy, or spawn their own fuzzy sets, as did *Interview with the*

¹¹ Ibid. 9.

¹² Attebery and I differ mildly on sword-and-sorcery, but that will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

¹³ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 164.

¹⁴ Ibid. 42.

¹⁵ Ibid. 44.

Vampire. This creates a shifting, three-dimensional map of genre that leaves nothing out. As Judith Kerman points out, genre boundaries are simultaneously necessary and arbitrary.¹⁶ Although I am still comfortable with the definition of English-language fantasy as a genre that combines a post-Enlightenment Western perspective, magic, and the supernatural, using a register of wonder more than terror, I am more satisfied with Attebery's scheme than any other put forward.

Early examples of the fantasy genre in English can be traced back to nineteenth-century Britain, when authors began to mine earlier works written in the fantastic mode as material for the novel, but Attebery locates J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy at the centre of fantasy's fuzzy set.¹⁷ This is of course not because the trilogy positioned itself perfectly according to pre-existing conventions, but because it marked a paradigm shift and a new set of conventions, and the fantasy genre grew up around it.

Also useful in this endeavour will be Farah Mendlesohn's classification scheme as outlined in her 2008 *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. While adopting Attebery's model of the fuzzy set--as nearly all fantasy scholars have--Mendlesohn proposes that most entries in the fantasy genre can be further classified according to the way in which they engage with the reader. There is Portal-Quest Fantasy, in which a character travels to a secondary world (or from a sheltered milieu reasonably familiar to the reader to a wider world) in order to accomplish some heroic task, and the reader learns about the world through this character's eyes; Intrusion Fantasy, in which fantastic elements erupt into a world understood to be this one; Immersive Fantasy, which takes place entirely in a world which

¹⁶ Judith Kerman, "Drawing Lines in the Sand: the Fantastic Considered as an Instance of Liminality," *Flashes of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from The War of the Worlds Centennial, Nineteenth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed. Ketterer, David (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), 184.

¹⁷ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 14.

is not this one, and which forces the reader to piece together its workings through the experiences of characters who already know the world; or Liminal Fantasy, in which the reader and the point-of-view character share a level of uncertainty as to what is fantastic and what is not.¹⁸ Mendlesohn also acknowledges the existence of texts that do not fit comfortably into one category or the other.

Mendlesohn's scheme is useful to the present endeavour in that it augments rather than contradicts Attebery's, and provides a language with which to talk about works that share certain sets of characteristics. That she focuses on the relationship with the audience while I will focus on the content is of no great moment.

Returning to Attebery's fuzzy sets, the set of genre fantasy is composed of many subsets, and can be organized according to a variety of criteria. The two subsets that concern this dissertation are high fantasy and urban fantasy.

The best adjective to describe high fantasy is "Tolkienesque." Tolkien himself laid out its guiding principles of Escape, Recovery, and Consolation. High fantasy almost always takes place in a secondary world, although some narratives make use of rural settings in this world.¹⁹ It almost always involves a heroic contest between good and evil, however those are envisioned, after which evil is vanquished.

By contrast, urban fantasy takes place in cities. Because this subgenre revolves more around a particular type of setting than a set of canonical works, the kinds of stories that can be told in this subgenre have been far more diverse from the outset. At a World

¹⁸ Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), xiv.

¹⁹ The works of Susan Cooper and Alan Garner arguably occupy the borderlands between high fantasy and urban fantasy--intrusion fantasies that involve the irruption of the past into (often) rural England. I have relegated them to the realm of high fantasy, albeit somewhat uncomfortably, with the conviction that this subgenre merits further study.

Fantasy Convention panel held in Toronto in November 2012, panelists Ginjer Buchanan, David B. Coe, Adria Laycraft, Linda Poitevin, Tim Powers, and S.M. Stirling²⁰ pointed out that four distinct types of fantasy have been called urban fantasy: fantasy that takes place in modern cities; fantasy that takes place in cities on other worlds; fantasy that takes place in historical cities, such as eighteenth-century London or medieval Venice; and fantasy that does not necessarily take place in cities at all, but involves romances or criminal investigations among supernatural beings.²¹ Representatives from each of these categories are treated in the final four chapters.

Returning to Mendlesohn's categories, high fantasy, as I have defined it, tends overwhelmingly to fall into the Portal-quest category.²² Even though the Lord of the Rings trilogy and many of its successors take place in a single world, they still involve characters who are naïve about the world moving from a space readily graspable by the reader into a wider, more complex one where the rules are different, and learning that world's magical workings along with the reader, preserving the rhetoric irrespective of the content of that learning. Fantasies in which the characters already have comprehensive knowledge about the world they inhabit, leaving the reader to piece together his or her own picture, are Immersive fantasies. With a few exceptions, urban fantasies tend to be either Intrusion or Immersive fantasies, depending on the location of the city.

It might be useful, before progressing, to explain why I consider marketing a factor in shaping the fantasy genre. Many early definitions of fantasy, including Tzvetan

²⁰ World Fantasy Convention Programme, <http://www.wfc2012.org/wfc2012-prog-grid01.pdf>, 3.

²¹ A good example of this would be Charlaine Harris' *Dead Until Dark*, which takes place in a small town. That rural vampire romances qualify as urban fantasy rather confirms my assertion that urban fantasy permits more ambiguity, hybridity, and multiplicity, as the only "urban" feature of the book is the relationship with a creature traditionally depicted as evil.

²² Mendlesohn writes it "Portal-quest"; it might be preferable to write it "Portal/Quest," in order to make it clear that it encompasses two different but overlapping strains of fantasy that share a rhetoric.

Todorov's Rosemary Jackson's and W.R. Irwin's, attempted to define the genre of fantasy so that what was actively marketed to readers as fantasy was largely excluded, shielding the budding field from the charge that it was popular culture and therefore beneath notice. However, as Gary Westfahl points out, "Zoologists do not study only a few of the best animals; they study all animals. The essence of the scientists' work, more than any special terminology or methodology, is to begin by gathering as much data as they can[.]"²³

While there is a great deal of difference between the hard sciences and the study of literature, a definition of the fantasy genre that deliberately ignores the influence of marketing paints a skewed picture of the genre. Marketing both reflects and influences how people envision genre's fuzzy sets. Surveying a sea of vampire romance novels with virtually identical covers, this can strike one as a distressing prospect; on the other hand, this is an outgrowth of one of the features that distinguishes genre fiction from other types of literature. George Slusser has pointed out that while mainstream literature is reprinted largely according to the needs of universities, genre fiction--particularly science fiction and fantasy--is reprinted according to the demands of the fan community.²⁴ Marketing does not work in one direction only; the continuing popularity of a book indicates that it resonates with readers in some way, and dedicated readers are capable of organizing to make their demands known.

²³ Gary Westfahl, "The Light Fantastic: The Systemic Obfuscation of Fantasy," *Genre at the Crossroads: The Challenge of Fantasy: A Collection of Essays* eds. George Slusser and Jean-Pierre Barricelli (Riverside CA: Xenos Books, 2003), 181.

²⁴ Gary Westfahl, "Introduction: Masters of the Literary Universe," *Science Fiction, Canonization, Marginalization, and the Academy*, eds. Gary Westfahl and George Slusser (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 2-3.

John Cawelti says, “formulas are ways in which specific cultural themes and stereotypes become embodied in more universal story archetypes.”²⁵ In other words, the creation and consumption of popular fiction involves tapping into, and contributing to, myth. Cawelti also shows that genre fiction can perform one of the functions of myth--narratively mediating between polar opposites. Wendy Doniger has identified myth as “a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meanings in it.”²⁶ Other features generally attributed to myth--that it is traditional, that it is anonymous--are the work of discursive markers that may or may not reflect the story’s actual circumstances of production. So, Doniger says, it is entirely possible for modern stories to constitute myth. In a time when the West’s traditional narratives no longer describe the world as we have come to understand it, fantasy is a new way of doing that thinking.

Those who attack fantasy as frivolous have often drawn a comparison between fantasy and fairy tales, with their connotations of childishness and artifice. But it has historically been part of the defense of fantasy to claim that part of its roots lie in myth, with its connotations of solemnity and cultural importance. Both assertions are equally true, and equally problematic; in fact, I would argue that they are not significantly different, except in tone. If there is a justifiable line between fairy tale and myth, it is a very blurry one.²⁷ Michelle Eilers has demonstrated convincingly that the pioneers of genre fantasy were moved to write based on the belief that fairy tales were beneficial for all audiences,

²⁵ Cawelti, 6.

²⁶ Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 2.

²⁷ As evidenced by the ease with which the stories cross boundaries. The Irish myth of Eochaid’s sons strongly resembles the Norwegian fairy tale “Tatterhood,” and the myth of Cupid and Psyche is an early incarnation of “Beauty and the Beast.”

and indeed, Tolkien's treatise on fantasy is called "On Fairy Stories." However, David Day points out that Tolkien set out to create a founding myth for England, and drew on other cultural myths to create it.²⁸

Eilers takes the position that it is the adoption of the fairy tale *and not* the decline of literal supernatural belief that influenced the creation of genre fantasy. While she demonstrates the former, her arguments do not address the latter either way. In fact, Eilers credits the Romantic movement with the renewal of interest in fairy tales²⁹, and the Romantic movement was itself a reaction to the decline in literal supernatural belief. Of course, phenomena can have more than one cause. Of the assertion that when magic was no longer an active force in people's lives, it became possible and even perhaps necessary to tell stories about it, we already have an illustrative example in the Gothic novel. It has its roots in the return of the repressed, the uncanny threat of supernatural horrors banished from public discourse and resurfacing as monsters in the human psyche.³⁰ In fantasy's case, however, the repressed is not wholly monstrous. Its fictionalization is a recovery effort, and the uncanny is greeted not with terror but with wonder. Brian Attebery has written of the frustration that Freudians have expressed with the Lord of the Rings trilogy:

Freudian analysis of the text is most productive in examining those parts of *LOTR* that are most like horror fantasy, the Lovecraftian touches that Tolkien uses for contrast with his idylls and elvish reveries. Freud's psychology seems particularly

²⁸ David Day, *Tolkien: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 7.

²⁹ Michelle L. Eilers, "On the Origins of Modern Fantasy," *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 41:4 (2000): 320-321.

³⁰ It could be argued that one of the functions of the Gothic is not only to give the reader a thrilling taste of the supernatural, but also to justify its banishment by marking it as essentially deadly and disruptive.

attuned to the rhetoric of horror, which is all about the revelation of suppressed secrets and disgust for bodily functions. [...] The Freudian notion of art, as something to be worked through, used up, and left behind once it has brought to consciousness whatever complex it was encapsulating, may explain the process of reading or writing horror fiction, but it is of little use in illuminating fantasy.³¹

Further, Attebery sees a fruitful tension in the interplay between fantasy's mythic tendencies and the format of the novel.³² In "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," Ursula Le Guin points out that the novel is fundamentally different from hero myths in particular. The latter type of myth she calls the killer story, because, she argues, it tends to be about the quest of one man to kill or defeat something, and the narrative is spear-shaped; the novel, however, is a representative of her carrier bag model, into which anything can be put. In the case of fantasy, what kind of mythic character can sustain an entire novel? How does that change the myth? If, as Cawelti says, formulaic novels reinscribe a culture's myths, what myths are they, and how does the novel support, challenge, or complicate them? These are all considerations for the next chapter.

Evil

What people in general mean when they talk about evil, and what fantasy authors mean when they write about evil, are overlapping but not identical concepts. It is useful to split evil into two categories: mythical evil, which is the province of myth scholars and

³¹ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 29-30.

³² Ibid. 75.

theologians, and moral evil, which is the province of ethicists. Moral evil, broadly speaking, is simply the thing that ought not to be done. It is malice, wickedness, cruelty, harm, and one of the questions I will treat is whether or not these ought to be called evil. Mythical evil is a concept that requires more unpacking, but briefly, it is evil as it exists in and for narrative.

It is not the case that moral and mythical evil are always distinct from each other, and it is very possible to talk about moral evil in mythical terms. The stories of those who resist moral evil in the form of oppression and injustice can always be framed in heroic--mythic--terms. Moreover, the satisfaction created by the story of a well fought battle is compounded by the certainty that victory is morally right, that the sufferings of the losers are in fact deserved, while fitting pain and loss into a heroic narrative is sometimes an effective coping strategy. As useful as it can be to conflate the two types, however, it is also useful, for the sake of analysis, to be able to separate them out again.

Mythical evil

One field in which claims are made about the relationship between moral and mythical evil is the field of theology. Martin Buber's 1953 book *Good and Evil: Two Interpretations* is a work of Jewish theology. The first part, "Right and Wrong," is an analysis of the Psalms, and irrelevant to the current study. The second section, "Images of Good and Evil," examines two sets of myths of the origins of evil--one set the Hebrew myths of the first humans who ate from the Tree of Knowledge, the first murder, and the flood; and the other the Persian stories, from the Avesta, of the two primal principles of good and

evil, and of Yima, who was a steward of the Earth on behalf of the gods until he began to believe that the Earth was his own. Buber uses these stories to argue that “in the factual context of the life of the human person, good and evil are not, as they are usually thought to be, two structurally similar qualities situated at opposite poles, but two qualities of totally different structure.”³³ These origin stories prefigure the origin stories that certain of the fantasies to be discussed--chiefly high fantasies, although *Son of Darkness* is one urban fantasy exception--ascribe to evil. Buber’s conclusions that good and evil are structurally different is useful as an illustration of what people think about evil, but the other conclusions he derives are not useful for the current study.

Vernon R. Mallow's *The Demonic* (1983) looks at how three iconic Christian theologians--Edwin Lewis, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich--view evil, critiquing their positions and presenting his own. Lewis, Mallow says, sees evil as an eternal, destructive Adversary opposed to an equally eternal, creative God.³⁴ Mallow critiques this view as positing "an eternal moral dualism"³⁵ and crediting evil with as much power as God. Barth, on the other hand, sees evil as a nothingness "that is utterly distinct from both God and His creation; it exists in its own peculiar fashion as a third order, constituting the frontier of God's creation and positive will."³⁶ For Paul Tillich, "The non-being in the depths of being-itself forces being-itself to dynamically affirm itself, and life and creation result."³⁷ However, life has the power to set itself apart from the divine, as the state of being created is itself an estrangement from God. Mallow criticizes this scheme as ahistorical.³⁸ Moreover, he says

³³ Martin Buber, *Good and Evil: Two Interpretations* (New York: Scribner, 1953), 64.

³⁴ Vernon R. Mallow, *The Demonic* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1983), 40.

³⁵ Ibid. 43.

³⁶ Ibid. 96.

³⁷ Ibid. 145.

³⁸ Ibid. 146.

that although Tillich tries to make evil the responsibility of the created, evil in his scheme is fruitful and vital and essential, and seems to have God as its source.³⁹ Mallow counters that evil is unnecessary and Tillich--and Lewis--both do wrong to posit a relationship between God and evil as anything other than radical exclusion. Mallow himself says that it is reasonable to posit the existence of a transcendent realm⁴⁰, in which creatures with perfect knowledge of the implications of freedom versus the implications of unity with God must decide their allegiances. Because they are fully aware of the consequences, their choices are irrevocable⁴¹, and those that choose freedom are cast out of God's presence to form the demonic host. Again, these are useful in providing additional examples of the various shapes that mythical evil is said to take, but are only examples; the conclusions that Mallow derives about human behaviour are not useful for the present enterprise.

In *A Frightening Love: Recasting the Problem of Evil* (2012), Christian theologian Andrew Gleeson says that those who consider evil a problem are misguided, as neither evil nor good are instrumental, and God's love is the only thing that can oppose evil. To take him to task for this creation is to misapprehend the depths of his love. Gleeson charges, "Theodicy is thus self-defeating. By seeking to find a function for evil it keeps us from the recognition of its pointlessness that we need to be free from its thrall."⁴²

As these examples show, theology is not relevant to the current investigation.⁴³ Arguably, theology attempts to explain the connections posited between the claims put

³⁹ Ibid. 147.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 156.

⁴¹ Ibid. 157.

⁴² Andrew Gleeson, *A Frightening Love: Recasting the Problem of Good and Evil* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 151.

⁴³ While it was initially my intent to seek out theology from multiple religions, the examples I studied were confined to Judeo-Christian theology. Being the easiest to find, they were the first ones that I read, and I soon became convinced that examples from other religions would not yield different results.

forward in sacred texts, and the present-day world. Even religious fantasy, however, does not cite the scriptures from which it derives its ethics: in fact, very frequently fantastic worlds will have their own religious texts, and even if these are meant as stand-ins for existing sacred books, they are changed enough to render the theology derived from the minute analysis of those sacred books invalid. The other anchoring point for theology, the present-day world, is lacking as well: even when the world is meant to be read as the present-day world, the addition of a fantasy element constitutes a fundamental change. The best that theology can provide is mythic contours that are perhaps better provided by scholars from other disciplines, who are not explicitly invested in the systems that they investigate.

Paul Ricoeur's *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967) examines what he sees as the progression, particularly in the Judeo-Christian tradition, of methods of representing evil. He argues that pollution is the first and oldest method, sin the second, and guilt the third and final. These mark changes in the concept of personal responsibility and the source of moral law. In the case of pollution, the law, and the consequences of its violation, are external and impersonal; sin is the violation of the law of a deity, and the consequences come from that deity; and guilt is a violation of the internalized norms exemplified by that deity, with punishment coming from the conscience of the violator. In other words, the progression is from the external to the internal. Ricoeur appears to embrace a determinist model of history that argues for a steady progression from one set of symbols to another, and that regards Christianity as the most advanced and therefore the best moral paradigm, but his work on the concept of pollution is valuable.

The Anthropology of Evil, edited by David Parkin, is a 1985 collection of essays that looks at the intersections of moral and mythical evil in several cultures around the world, albeit from a Western perspective. From the outset, Parkin cautions that different social structures give rise to different ethical structures, and that “because different metaphysical schemes refer not to demonstrable, universal truths, but to cultural presuppositions, the variations will always continue.”⁴⁴ Parkin’s introduction usefully acknowledges the great range of things that we can talk about when we talk about “evil”:

[W]e can see at a glance why the English word 'evil' has been so useful to social anthropologists. It can refer to extreme fear, death and destruction, but also to lesser misfortunes. It may denote an agent's firm intention to harm, or instead may be seen as originating in an unintended human or non-human condition. Evil agents may be abhorrent, but they may also be admired for their cleverness. While people may be terrified of the deadly effects of the worst kinds of evil, they can at other times joke about it and make humorous parallels. Talk about evil thus ranges over the terrible and serious as well as the playful and creative.”⁴⁵

He adds, “It is precisely because the term has been so loose analytically that it has been able to reveal so much empirically.”⁴⁶ Parkin notes that in the English language, “evil” captures

⁴⁴ Parkin, David. “Introduction,” *The Anthropology of Evil*, ed. David Parkin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 1

⁴⁶ Ibid. 2

...at least three senses: the moral, referring to human culpability; the physical, by which it is understood destructive elemental forces of nature, for example earthquakes, storms, or the plague; and the metaphysical, by which disorder in the cosmos or in relations with divinity results from a conflict of principles or wills.⁴⁷

In the cultures represented in the essays in Parkin's book, concepts that have been linked to evil incorporate the "worthless, unclean, and thence bad, ugly and even sad"; "disorder"; "'falling short of a target', 'breaking of a relationship, or rebelliousness', and 'twisting, making crooked or wrong'"; "physically rotten, misshapen, and ugly"; "madness"; "ugliness and dirt"; "the immoderate heat of the sun"; "inert and benighted lethargy"; and "blackness, obscurity and unfulfilment."⁴⁸ These portrayals are engendered by different cosmologies. Evaluating the world's majority religions, Parkin finds in their characterizations of evil "a primordial sense of incompleteness, imperfection, or privation that can be stretched in two main directions: as a necessary or inevitable weakness of a cosmic totality; or as threateningly opposed to the whole of which it was once part."⁴⁹ Some senses of the concept of evil imply that remedies are available, built into the societies of which they are part. Other senses of it regard evil as an impenetrable transgression of humanity itself.⁵⁰ But Parkin reiterates his warnings against the temptation to impose European meanings on other cultures, saying, that "[t]he primordial sense of ambivalent

⁴⁷ Ibid. 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 9.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 12.

power arising from excess is a safer common focus, whether or not, and however, it is expressed in words.”⁵¹

He further cautions:

“*Evil is not anything*: it denotes rather an area of discourse concerning human suffering, human existential predicaments and the attempted resolution of these through other humans and through non-human agencies, including a God or gods. In asking whether evil can be eliminated, people are also led into considering the possibility that good may in fact sometimes come out of evil; that it may even be necessary, and that it can be personified, perhaps among people known to them.”⁵²

At the end of the chapter, I will raise some problems with personifying an area of discourse concerning human suffering.

A number of essays in the volume are not useful to the current study, and therefore will not be treated here. David Pocock’s essay “Unruly evil” first deals with a number of non-Western cultures “in which beliefs about ‘witchcraft’ and/or ‘sorcery’ are institutionalized and salient”⁵³, but the second half of his essay, in which he surveys attitudes about evil in contemporary England, is illuminating. He notes (again, writing in 1985) that among secular philosophers, “the word ‘evil’ is obsolescent”⁵⁴; among laypeople, however, most use the word “evil” “with a vigour and emotion that made it clear that the

⁵¹ Ibid. 14.

⁵² Ibid. 10-11.

⁵³ David Pocock, “Unruly evil,” *The Anthropology of Evil*, ed. David Parkin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 43.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 50.

substitution of the word 'bad' would have been wholly inadequate"⁵⁵, while a minority find "evil" to be too strong a word to use in the absence of certainty about human motivation.

He adds:

"The minority regard explicability as something to be sought, whereas for the majority, any attempt to explain motives was regarded at best as misguided and at worst as participating in the very evil that, by explaining, it appeared to extenuate. Finally, it is clear that the word 'evil' has, for the majority, a totalizing force that, we can properly say, makes 'evil people' monsters in the sense that they are denied all admirable human attributes such as love or loyalty."⁵⁶

He attributes the difference to the majority's willingness to consider humanity circumstantial, dependent on adherence to behaviour that marks one as "like oneself," and the minority's refusal to do the same. Pocock writes, "I have suggests that the word 'evil' has ontic weight additional to its weight in the language of morality; but it does operate in that language to define the outer limits of the bad. Consequently, I do not see why the judgements 'bad' and 'good' are not to be withheld with the same delicacy and caution[...]"⁵⁷, and he goes on to say, "were the holders of the minority view of the word 'evil' to be rational, they might have difficulty in sustaining their right to make any moral judgement."⁵⁸ However, it seems probable that this minority hesitates precisely because of

⁵⁵ Ibid. 50.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 51.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 53.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 56.

this ontic weight that names human beings monsters lacking “all admirable human attributes”.

“The seed of evil within,” David Rheubottom’s essay, examines ideas about evil in the Macedonian rural area of Skopska Crna Gora. The inhabitants, Rheubottom says, “see themselves as a beleaguered community with hostile neighbours of differing nationalities and religions.”⁵⁹ Eastern Orthodox citizens of an officially atheist Communist state⁶⁰, their conception of evil is bound up not only with religion but also with politics.⁶¹ One’s own wealth tends to be regarded as the result of hard work and personal worth, while the wealth of others is ascribable to either luck or evil:

The not-lucky will stoutly maintain that he is just as worthy, and has worked just as hard, as the lucky. [...] To help oneself to some of the lucky person’s possessions, or to destroy some of what he has, is merely to re-establish an equitable distribution of reward.

But there is another side to this coin. If an opportunity to steal or destroy presents itself, and there is no likelihood of being seen, then it would be wrong not to seize the chance.⁶²

Meanwhile, an ethic of treating the “genuinely poor”⁶³ well competes with folk belief that misfortune is God’s punishment for the misdeeds of the previous generation.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ David Rheubottom, “The seed of evil within,” *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 79.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 79.

⁶¹ Ibid. 81.

⁶² Ibid. 85.

⁶³ Ibid. 86.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 86.

Rheubottom finds that Crna Gora's ideas of evil are bound up with the breaching of boundaries, and the constant need to guard them or shore them up.⁶⁵ This is, interestingly, a pattern that occurs in the work of Mercedes Lackey.

David Parkin returns with the penultimate essay, "Entitling evil: Muslims and non-Muslims in coastal Kenya," in which he discusses concepts of evil among the Mijikenda and the Swahili people. He observes:

I find that, in societies in which evil is not verbalized in any clear manner, human frailties are more tolerantly accepted; that is to say, they are regarded as shared by everyone. By contrast, where the idea of evil is especially marked, people seem less likely to take the view that the evil in others is potentially that which exists in all of us. Evil is here more likely to be the work and ultimate responsibility of other persons or peoples, and even of a God. ⁶⁶

Parkin notes that as more of the Bantu Mijikenda convert to Christianity, they adopt views more closely aligned with the Muslim Swahili, becoming less tolerant of human frailty, and this he sees as a sign of advancement. From this he concludes:

Westerners may have to face the unpleasant possibility that, for them, the little used concept of radical evil is the only way they can recognize the existence of the unacceptable. [...] It is a hard job for history always to place judgements about

⁶⁵ Ibid. 90.

⁶⁶ David Parkin, "Entitling evil: Muslims and non-Muslims in coastal Kenya," *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 224-243, 228.

man's destructiveness towards fellow-humans in the hands of man himself and his agents. It is good from time to time to have a God to take on that responsibility.⁶⁷

He muses that evil may be summed up as a misplaced sense of entitlement that a tolerance for human frailty does little or nothing to counteract.⁶⁸ This latter framing, with its equation of entitlement with moral weakness and its assertion that acknowledgement of moral absolutes are a prerequisite for any kind of morality at all, strikes me more as a product of mid-1980s conservatism than as a genuine moral insight, but it is, again, an interesting illustration of the ways in which culture takes up ideas about evil.

The final essay in the collection, Joanna Overing's "There is no end of evil: the guilty innocents and their fallible god," looks at the mythology of the Piaroa in Venezuela. Overing draws connections between Christian mythology of the Fall and Piaroa myths of the "poisonous" acquisition of wisdom and culture, and the roles of these myths in dictating the shapes of guilt in their respective cultures, but she argues that Ricoeur's characterization of the relationships between different kinds of guilt as an evolutionary one is inaccurate, as a culture can entertain ideas of guilt and pollution simultaneously.

In *Our Faith in Evil: Melodrama and the Effects of Entertainment Violence* (2006), Gregory Desilet makes an argument that the ethic of pollution is alive and well in Western culture, cultivated by melodrama in entertainment. Melodrama, he charges, deals with good and evil, permitting victory only when the thing branded as the polluting source of

⁶⁷ Ibid. 241.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 242.

evil is destroyed utterly.⁶⁹ Tragedy, on the other hand, permits more moral complexity, acknowledging that antagonists may have good reasons for acting as they do.⁷⁰ Tragedy, he argues, results in catharsis; melodrama stirs up feelings that are released only superficially by the work itself, and are therefore ripe to be released as real violence.⁷¹ Although Regina M. Schwartz⁷² and René Girard⁷³ have argued that this is a function of Christian religious belief, both storytelling traditions have a presence in virtually every religion.

Although the contours of Desilet's argument somewhat resemble my own, it differs in several places. First of all, Desilet looks at popular entertainment solely as popular entertainment, without considering deeper levels of belief and investment, and he does so from a specifically American perspective. He holds up the statistic of US firearm deaths as proof of the ill effects of melodramatic entertainment. Confronting relatively low numbers in the rest of the world, his response is, "If it is true that American individualism increases the potential for violent crimes perpetrated by one person on another, that may be represented as progress in terms of the cost of human life in comparison to the far greater consequences of group-on-group violence evidenced in many other areas of the world."⁷⁴ Desilet minimizes institutionalized violence against Indigenous people and Black people, framing it as a past aberration rather than an ongoing problem.⁷⁵ His position, further, ignores the stronger investment that American popular culture has in its founding myths, which frame outsiders as potential enemies, and precludes the possibility that people from

⁶⁹ Gregory Desilet, *Our Faith in Evil: Melodrama and the Effects of Entertainment Violence* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2006), 105.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 76.

⁷¹ Ibid. 117.

⁷² Ibid. 201.

⁷³ Ibid. 204.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 194.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 194.

countries outside America might have access to the same melodramatic entertainment, but less investment in the melodramatic structure.

Secondly, Desilet calls for boycotts of violent video games⁷⁶, dismisses melodramatic film as “junk cinema”⁷⁷, and responds to the melodramatic *Silence of the Lambs*’ winning the award for Best Picture in 1991 by saying, “The Academy dishonors itself by promoting the agenda of such films with awards.”⁷⁸ This suggests that he considers melodrama to be, if not thoroughly devoid of artistic merit, at least so dangerous and irresponsible that it should not be rewarded, encouraged, or consumed. It seems ironic that Desilet, who speaks about the dangers of an ethic of pollution, would then treat melodrama itself as a kind of pollution. The entertainment that Desilet calls melodramatic can be well crafted, moving, and surprising. Like fantasy, its structure departs from reality in key places, but also like fantasy, that departure can illuminate important things about our world, and strike satisfying notes in the human psyche. It must, however, be read critically. Desilet might well point out that what is satisfying is not always morally right, and that if melodrama causes such widespread human misery then his conclusions are not unreasonable, but again, we have the example of OECD nations outside of the US, where melodramas from America and elsewhere are consumed but crime rates are much lower.

Also writing in 2006, Michael Allen Gillespie takes a historical perspective, tracing the roots of a bifurcation in Western ideas about mythical evil, that went on to inform our ideas of moral evil. He writes that in Europe, medieval theological thought underwent a revolution, inspired by William of Ockham, that stripped the West of its ability to talk about

⁷⁶ Ibid. 152.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 200.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 239.

evil in anything but Manichean terms. In an attempt to navigate between the heresies of Manicheanism (the idea that good and evil are two equally powerful forces) and Pelagianism (the idea that humans attain heaven through their actions), theologians had managed to incorporate the teachings of Aristotle into Christian thought in a way that saw divine wisdom as accessible through human reason. Gillespie calls this approach scholasticism. Dante, he says, wrote *The Divine Comedy* under this scheme, which acknowledged both greater and lesser evils, accompanied by punishments of appropriate severity. But Ockham argued that a God accessible through and acting according to reason could not be omnipotent; that the Christian God was omnipotent, so he could not be bound by reason. This line of thought Gillespie calls nominalism, and its portrayal of a capricious and unpredictable deity was bolstered by the Black Death, the Hundred Years' War, and ecclesiastical unrest.⁷⁹ In turn, nominalism fostered two further schools of thought: humanism, which charged that each person is, as nominalism suggests, a unique and special creation, and that one should discover one's true nature and live according to that nature⁸⁰; and the Reformation. Martin Luther contended that since God must be omnipotent, free choice is an illusion. Those who believe they act in accordance with their own wills are in fact slaves to Satan; only humans who act in accordance with God's will are capable of doing good. Gillespie points out that this divorced the moral weight of actions from their content: "Action that would be considered morally good is evil if it is not also pious, and action that might otherwise be evil can be good if inspired by God. This is a

⁷⁹ Michael Allen Gillespie, "Chapter 1: Where Did All the Evils Go?" *Naming Evil, Judging Evil*, ed. Ruth W. Grant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 24.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 26.

recipe for disaster.”⁸¹ Hobbes, Descartes, and other rationalist philosophers developed their ideas in reaction to the ideas of the Reformation. Gillespie characterizes rationalism and science as “a radically Pelagian enterprise⁸²” haunted by the spectre of Manicheanism:

[T]he failure of progress or modernity is attributed to the evil influence of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, fundamentalism, imperialism, and so on. Radical evil lurks just beneath the surface of the scientifically interpreted and formed world, but when it appears, it is understood not as intrinsic to the world but in opposition to it. It is thus not a relative evil, but always only absolute evil, whether it lies in ‘the system’ or in some ‘rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem to be born.’⁸³

Gillespie argues that reclaiming evil as a part of the basic makeup of human nature would help demystify evil, and give us a way to talk about it. In other words, he advocates that evil be plucked from the mythical realm and planted more solemnly in the moral realm.

Robert Ellwood, in his 2009 book *Tales of Darkness*, also focuses on evil from a purely mythical standpoint. Drawing from myths and legends around the world, he includes in this category what is often called “natural evil”--acts of nature that, although unintentional, result in great harm and suffering. Examples of natural evil would include natural disasters, or beasts that kill humans because it is their nature to be predators. Ellwood includes death itself in this category, as many of the stories he cites deal with the introduction of death to humans who were supposed to be immortal. But another category

⁸¹ Ibid. 29.

⁸² Ibid. 33.

⁸³ Ibid. 33.

of mythical evil, as Ellwood posits it, incorporates the foe that exists only for the hero to defeat. Moreover, the actions of a hero are the only way to defeat this kind of evil, and Ellwood's section on overcoming evil is devoted mainly to different types of hero.

It should be clear that heroism is a different order of behaviour, to suit a different order of evil. Everyday goodness--or even, for that matter, abstention from badness--cannot overcome mythical evil. And the hero who can overcome mythical evil is empowered to do things that would be considered wrong if they were done to anyone else. So, mythical evil is not shaped by moral rules, but rather by the needs of the hero, the needs of the story of the hero, the needs of the author or teller, and the needs of the culture that produced the narrative.

Michael Allen Gillespie has charged that Western culture no longer has a way of talking about evil, John Cawelti, on the other hand, points to numerous discussions of the nature of evil, and the best way to deal with it. Gillespie, however, deals with theology and philosophy; Cawelti deals with fiction. In I will show that in a troubling number of cases, when people set out to talk about moral evil, they end up talking about mythical evil as it appears in fiction.

Moral Evil

In his 1991 book *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, Raymond Gaita describes his philosophical approach as "naturalism." It is based on the belief that human ethics are innate, and that this innate sense can function as a moral compass in complex ethical

situations. An example of this is his evaluation of Alan Donagan's claim that the seat of humanity's specialness lies in our status as "rational creatures." Gaita takes up Donagan's illustration of the proper recognition of human specialness, Falstaff's admonition to the king, in Shakespeare's *Henry IV I*, that the human bodies he speaks of were "mortall men, mortall men".⁸⁴ Gaita agrees with Donagan—as do I—that "a person who has no chance of flourishing and who has no reasonable ground for self-esteem [should be] the intelligible object of such uncondescending pity".⁸⁵ But where Donagan sees the seat of this requirement for uncondescending pity as the fact that a human is (or has the potential to be) "a rational creature"⁸⁶, Gaita rejoins:

‘Tush man, rational beings, rational beings’. According to Donagan that is what is morally salient in Falstaff's reminder to the Prince. Why does it sound like a parody? Because it abstracts their rationality as the morally salient focus of his respect. We cannot bring their rationality to the fore in anything like the way required by Donagan and still retain the power of this passage: it has no place in it, not even in parenthesis or *sotto voce*.⁸⁷

The conclusion of Gaita's critique is sound, but his methods are not appropriate to the current study. The value of rationality as a determinant of human dignity is an ethical and philosophical question; the ease with which a substitution can be made in a Shakespeare quotation is an aesthetic one. This is not quite a conflation of mythical evil with moral evil,

⁸⁴ Gaita, Raymond. *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 24.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 26.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 27.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 28.

but it is the same kind of error, a mistaken belief that what is moving or resonant in fiction can therefore necessarily be turned into an ethical precept.

Gaita's approach is very useful for determining what certain human beings think. However, the field of ethics does not concern itself solely with what is, but also what ought to be, and aesthetics simply does not provide a sufficiently strong ought.

Philosopher Mary Midgley's 2001 book *Wickedness* advances the idea that evil is the result of a wish for boundlessness, chiefly the wish to assert one's own interests without regard for the interests of others.⁸⁸ In other words, she sees evil not as a positive thing that wishes destruction in order to assert its own limitlessness, but a lack of limiting qualities that humans must possess if they are to take care of each other.⁸⁹ Sometimes this lack is cultivated in the form of rejecting one's own Jungian-style shadow, and projecting it onto others, in an attempt to rid oneself of evil.⁹⁰

Midgley argues against the idea that evil--wickedness, as she calls it--is mythical. Her grounds for rejecting this idea, however, seem rooted in the conflation of evil and Christian ideas of sin, so that to reject the argument she has only to assure the reader of the utility of a concept of evil that does not involve sin.⁹¹

The author also entertains and rejects several other philosophical stances on evil. Schemes that champion anything styled as immorality are actually critiques of existing morality rather than genuine celebrations of evil⁹²; there are still some things that immoralists consider wrong. Schemes that conflate aggression and evil, making possible

⁸⁸ Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London: Routledge, 2001), 156-157.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 14.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 126.

⁹¹ Ibid. 10-12.

⁹² Ibid. 47.

the conclusion that humans, with their inborn capacity for aggression, are innately evil, ignore the more positive aspects of aggression, as well as the equally inborn capacities for controlling and harnessing aggression in constructive ways.⁹³ On the other hand, schemes that reject the idea of biological or societal causes for evil as negating free will misapprehend the relationship between choice and scientific prediction.⁹⁴

Midgley points out that while only human actions tend to be given moral weight (at least, by other humans who recognize the humanity of those they judge), we share with animals a set of desires, impulses, and social structures. The difference between humans and animals, she says, is that we as a species tend to spend much more time weighing which needs are best met at a given time.⁹⁵ Systems of morality are necessary for giving us a set of priorities--so that, for example, the social need to be at an appointment on time, and the personal desire to lash out at frustrating circumstances, are trumped by social mores that discourage abuse of slow walkers. It is not human impulses that are necessarily at fault, but rather our methods for managing these impulses.

Wary of overusing the traditional examples of the Nazis and thereby giving the impression that evil is foreign and already beaten⁹⁶, or of using contemporary examples and being drawn into taking sides⁹⁷, Midgley uses examples from literature--including the fantasies *Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* by James Hogg, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*--to illustrate her points about the ways in which humans distance themselves from their aggressive tendencies, and the harm

⁹³ Ibid. 93-94.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 114.

⁹⁵ Ibid. xi.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 5.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 6.

that this does. In the case of Milton's Satan and Shakespeare's Iago, however, she questions whether the Freudian theory that would attribute their motives to the Death Drive is in fact satisfactory, and whether these fictional representations have analogues in reality.

Both Terry Eagleton (2010) and Francois Flahault (2003) locate the roots of intentional harm in the tension between a human need for power and boundlessness, and the equally human need for other people.⁹⁸ Flahault uses works such as *Frankenstein* and *Caleb Williams*, while Eagleton--who asserts that evil is largely institutional in nature⁹⁹, with boundlessness the natural goal of capitalism--discusses the case of the title character in William Golding's *Pincher Martin* and Flann O'Brien's surrealist novel *The Third Policeman*. One difficulty with these closely related images of evil is that while this scheme can be stretched to fit some acts classically considered evil, such as genocide, it does not easily cover others. Harm can be done in the name of asserting oneself over others, or of extinguishing competing ethnicities, religions, or ideologies...but it can also be done in the name of others, for the good of others--in many cases, ostensibly for the good of the same people being harmed--or without any thought at all.

Daryl Koehn, in her 2007 book *The Nature of Evil*, argues that evil stems from incomplete knowledge of the self and the frustration of desire. She claims that what she calls the moralistic tradition informs how we deal with evil, treating it as the result of vice. At best, the moralistic tradition does little or nothing to address evil because it presupposes that people are free to change their behaviour, while someone in the grip of evil is incapable of change; at worst, it exacerbates evil by giving the self-righteous fodder

⁹⁸ Francis Flahault, *Malice*, trans. Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 8-9; Terry Eagleton, *On Evil* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 31-32.

⁹⁹ Eagleton 143.

for moralistic crusades that cause more evil than they prevent. Meanwhile, the tradition of wisdom demands an objective standard of morality that stems from knowledge of oneself, contemplation of the divine, and harmony with the universe.¹⁰⁰ Under this scheme, even things that harm no one but oneself, such as panic and anxiety, are evil.¹⁰¹ Koehn uses examples from literature, such as Dante's *Inferno*, Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, and the Gospels to show that acts that the reader would agree are evil have their roots in misguided quests for satisfaction, asserting that "we" fall prey to analogous follies.

Among the difficulties with Koehn's argument is that a definition of evil that is so different from other definitions that it involves panic and anxiety must be argued for far more strenuously--perhaps with hedges that absolve those who have panic and anxiety disorders--than Koehn does here. Secondly, Koehn's definition of the good relies on an objective moral standard, a divine presence to contemplate, and the assumption that self-knowledge and harmony with the universe are linked. These are not philosophical concepts, but religious ones, and they are never satisfactorily unpacked. Finally, Koehn readily uses literature--including a misreading of *The Turn of the Screw* that destroys the text's use of ambiguity--to move from the specific to the general, the individual to the universal. "We" are not the governess or Tom Ripley, and although the authors who created them do a good job of showing why these characters act the way they do, it does not follow that their models of the human psyche have the predictive power that Koehn ascribes to them.

¹⁰⁰ Daryl Koehn, *The Nature of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 256.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 264. Koehn's characterization of widespread mental health problems as instances of culpable evil is deeply problematic, to say the least.

In *The Roots of Evil* (2005), John Kekes writes that to be evil an act must fulfill three conditions: that it is harmful, excessive, and malevolent. Evil has a mixture of internal and external, active and passive causes. Kekes maintains that although the perpetrators of the Albigenian Crusade, the Terror, and the Holocaust believed that they were purging evil, they could not have genuinely believed that their actions were justified because their actions caused unjust suffering and surpassed the limits imposed by viable society: "The denial of the victims' full humanity is just as implausible because they look, act, and especially suffer like other humans."¹⁰² And yet he writes, "The limits, however, are prima facie, not absolute. They may be justifiably violated in war, defense against terrorism, or the punishment of evildoers. In such cases, serious harm is caused, but it is justifiable, provided it is not excessive and malevolent."¹⁰³ Further, he says that there are cases that "demand that evil be done in order to prevent even greater evil. These are heartbreaking situations in which morally committed people must regularly violate their commitment."¹⁰⁴ "[U]ncorrupted members of society"¹⁰⁵ are free to issue "condemnation [...]" not primarily of the evil actions, but of the people whose actions they are and for being the kind of persons they are."¹⁰⁶ Presumably this would hold even if "they look, act, and [...] suffer like other humans."¹⁰⁷ Kekes does not acknowledge that while it may be very easy to say from the outside that a certain violation of such limits was unjustifiable, the paradigm he has laid out does nothing to prevent actions that he calls evil, because the limits are only ever

¹⁰² John Kekes, *The Roots of Evil* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 209.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 192.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 207.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 203.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 203.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 209.

transgressed *en masse* by people who believe that they are indeed doing only what is necessary to punish or prevent evil while they themselves remain uncorrupted.

Additionally, Kekes appears to argue that to refuse to call actions evil is to condone or justify them; that to acknowledge that the people who perpetrated atrocities honestly believed that they were doing the right thing is to say that their actions were in fact right. Although he acknowledges the existence of the merely morally bad, there appears to be little room for it in his moral scheme. The preservation of the category of evil, and the hedges that he puts around it—that it is a form of corruption, that it alone is worth transgressing “the limits of a viable society” to prevent or punish, that those who practice what is judged to be evil should be condemned for who they are rather than what they do—create a situation that ironically justifies the type of action it is meant to condemn.

Maria Pia Lara, in *Narrating Evil*, from 2007, suggests that evil is real, but not a quality of persons or events. It is rather a socially constructed category, suitable for application only after a culture has found a way to talk about traumatic events. Lara acknowledges that evil is narratively constituted, and furthermore argues that this is the way things should be. She posits that while philosophers often deal in determinant moral judgments, it is reflective judgment that shapes cultural opinion and is translated into international laws designed to prevent or punish those deeds that collective reflective judgment condemns as evil. Part of the process of reflective judgment involves using stories to think through and communicate about traumatic events that cannot be addressed by more direct language. Often a story will contribute something disclosive: a term, metaphor, or concept that captures the spirit of the evil that has been done in ways not previously apprehended. Examples she uses are Hannah Arendt’s concepts of

totalitarianism and the banality of evil, or Raphael Lemkin's coining of the term "genocide." But whether or not a story is disclosive is decided by more than the story itself; it has to be taken up and discussed in the public sphere. Thereby, we progress to a deeper understanding of evil, good, and what it means to be human.

This looks like an excellent theory from the perspective of scholars of moral evil. As a myth scholar, however, I consider this cause for concern: there is nothing to say that the narratives a culture uses to clarify the concept of evil will be the narratives that shed light on actual wrong done in the actual world. Lara herself acknowledges Jürgen Habermas' contention that history is not a fixed thing, but constantly recreated in dialogue with the culture that is doing the telling. It is just as likely that a narrative will be taken up because it fits with preexisting narratives or prejudices. Lara draws a careful line between narratives that provide insight into evil and narratives that justify what will later come to be called evil, but these two properties can coexist in the same text. After all, any meaning a text produces is produced in dialogue with the reader, so the reader's context and culture will be of extreme importance. A stirring indictment of the dehumanizing aspects of modernity can become, in another time, a template to slavishly copy, or a license to kill orcs.

Lara sees that the use of fictional examples in discussions of evil has to be argued for--and her argument is a convincing one when applied to the examples that she chooses. She points out that narration is one of the tools of reflective judgment. But the narratives she talks about are narratives of past trauma; at most they are fiction set during or immediately after real and specific traumatic historical events. This is a very different type of literature from that cited by the authors above. In part, where authors such as William

Golding, Mary Shelley, and William Godwin concern themselves with the actions of individuals--criminals in a society depicted as otherwise ordinary--the pieces Lara uses as examples, such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Death and the Maiden*, explore systems that demonstrably made it possible for otherwise ordinary people to do grievous harm to their fellow human beings. Using narrative as a way of thinking through past, real atrocities is different from using narrative to imaginatively explore an emotionally and mythically charged concept. While neither is impermissible, of course, it stands to reason that the narrative that starts with actual atrocities and works backwards is less likely to lend itself to mythical evil.

The most satisfactory discussion of moral evil that I have found has been Philip Cole's 2008 book *The Myth of Evil*, which questions whether even the most terrible deeds should be branded as evil. Evil, he says, is a mythical concept with mythical overtones that suggest--as Terry Eagleton pointed out--that evil is its own cause, a different order of behaviour untouchable by rational understanding. Cole agrees with Eagleton that positing evil as its own cause creates far more pressing problems than it solves, but his solution is not, as Eagleton did, to redefine evil, but to advocate that the term be done away with altogether, at least as it applies to human behaviour in the real world. He points out, as has Fred Katz, that one of the conditions that aid in the commission of atrocities is the belief that the subjects of those atrocities are somehow less than human. Cole goes further, pointing out that calling someone evil indeed brands that person as less than human, and implies that the world would benefit from their removal, a charge that is illustrated by the work of Pocock and Kekes, as well as by Michael Ignatieff, whose work will be discussed shortly. He draws links between the discourse surrounding present-day terrorists and the

discourse surrounding Jewish people in Nazi Germany.¹⁰⁸ In short, branding someone as evil places that person in a mythical framework that justifies maltreatment; better to acknowledge that harm has complex societal causes. The tendency I have noted, to use literature in discussions of supposedly real evil, bears out Cole's conclusions.

Luke Russell, in *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation* (2014), advances a theory of both evil action and evil personhood:

I propose that all evil actions are extreme culpable wrongs, where 'extreme' means appropriately connected to an actual or possible harm that is extreme for at least one victim, and 'appropriately connected' means that the action culpably produces or was intended to produce such a harm, or (more contentiously) that the action foreseeably would have produced such a harm if it was successful or if it had its typical effects, or (even more contentiously) that the action is an appreciation of such harm.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ As for the Nazis themselves, while I agree that if evil did exist they would be an unambiguous example of it, Cole says, "To refuse to demonise is not to forgive, and indeed [...] the possibility of history rests on understanding. To demonise those who perpetrated the Holocaust is to refuse to face the lessons of history" (Cole, 175). He points out that German civilians and even Nazi functionaries who were not outright antipathetic towards Jewish people were still living in a nation, and a broader European culture, that did not accord them full humanity and rather regarded them as a barrier to some sort of achievable cultural purity, therefore painting German resistance to the Nazi programme as an act of weakness or squeamishness rather than an ethical stance. (Cole 187, 190.)

I myself do not find the Nazis to be the exception that proves the existence of evil for two reasons:

1) The Nazis were not an example of radical discontinuity, but rather a perfect storm, so to speak, of sentiments that were at the time widely embraced: anti-Semitism, nationalism, militarism, imperialism, and industrialism. Neither were the Nazis the only example of these sentiments leading to genocide: Britain and America also killed millions of people, and it is only recently that these nations' colonial pasts have stopped being *valorized*. To apply the term "evil" to the Nazis, but not to others, implies that there is something different about the Nazis, something that absolves other nations and other people of complicity in atrocities.

2) The Nazis have been taken up as modern examples of mythical evil to a degree that I find troubling. Certain science fiction and fantasy films (for example, *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*) (TV Tropes, "Putting on the Reich") invoke Nazis with visual cues in order to signify that enemies are faceless evil hordes.

¹⁰⁹ Luke Russell, *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 62.

My full account of evil personhood is as follows: S is an evil person if and only if S is strongly and highly fixedly disposed to perform evil actions when in autonomy-favouring conditions, or S is strongly and highly fixedly disposed to have unrepudiated evil feelings when in autonomy-favouring conditions.¹¹⁰

According to Russell, some accounts of evil are “psychologically thick,” hinging on a certain psychological quality such as malice, sadism, or defiance¹¹¹, while some are “psychologically thin” and hinge on the perpetrator’s actions rather than the state of mind. Flahaut’s and Eagleton’s characterization of evil as boundlessness, for example, is psychologically thick, while Hannah Arendt’s, which allows ordinary people to participate in atrocities, is psychologically thin.

As I will explain shortly, I side with Phillip Cole in believing that “evil” is not a helpful category to apply to human beings or their actions, but Russell’s argument here is one that perhaps warrants playing evil’s advocate. Russell asserts that a harmless action can be evil if it is “appropriately connected to an actual or possible harm that is extreme for at least one victim”. This means that some extremely harmful human actions can be morally preferable to malicious harmless actions. For example, under this scheme a failed suicide bomber, a preacher who in private prayer calls down God’s wrath on a nation, or for that matter an angry adolescent who goes to the graveyard at midnight and places curses on her classmates have all engaged in evil actions even though they have harmed no one; but a person whose good-faith belief that vaccinations are harmful leads to an

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 192.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 124.

epidemic that causes death and disability, a person whose purchasing decisions support war or poverty or child slavery, and a person who tortures and murders witches in the sincere belief that they are saving souls have not, even though their actions have widespread, harmful, in some cases dehumanizing consequences. Their actions may or may not be covered by the "psychologically thin" account of evil that regards extremely culpable harm as evil whether it was intentional or not, but definitions of "extremely culpable" are contentious and still hinge on the state of mind of the actor rather than the nature of the act being performed. It still seems odd to claim that an action that harms no one is just as bad as, or worse than, one that does extreme harm to thousands or millions.

Although Russell acknowledges that the majority of thinkers he surveys believe that evil actions must be harmful, he charges that they do not explain their reasoning. However, outside of purely mythical and religious schemes (such as Koehn's), it seems reasonable to suppose that harm is one of the defining features of evil as it is understood by our culture. Even thinkers who are heavily invested in the idea of evil do not believe that it should be applied lightly, and to posit a harmless evil is to spread the net far too wide for the degree of condemnation that calling something evil implies.

Russell writes that the burden of proof is on Cole to explain why "a psychologically thick conception of evil action is not explanatorily useful."¹¹² However, he concedes that it is possible to do extreme harm without any of these psychological hallmarks. Moreover, it is possible to use feelings of malice and defiance as motivators to complete fairly innocuous if not outright benign tasks--for athletes or students or artists to push themselves in order to "show them," or for defiance to form the basis of an action in support of justice. Sadism

¹¹² Ibid. 199.

seems like a likelier candidate, but Russell writes that there is a fine line between taking pleasure in justice done, and in sadistic enjoyment of suffering.¹¹³ From one angle, this seems like a perfectly reasonable claim. However, according to the scheme he has set out, it is difficult to understand how justice and evil can sit so uncomfortably close to each other. It appears that a psychologically thick conception of evil does not apply to many harmful actions, would apply to many neutral or benign ones, and threatens to confuse justice with moral wrongs. In light of these objections, it seems reasonable to conclude that a psychologically thick conception of evil is indeed not useful.

A second difficulty with Russell's scheme is that although he acknowledges that people can have their dispositions shaped by circumstances beyond their control, he also registers agreement with the folk belief that those with evil dispositions deserve the strongest possible condemnation. Conceivably, then, it is possible to damage a person, *through no fault of their own*, to such a degree that they *become* blameworthy:

For instance, it is perfectly coherent for people to agree that Stalin was an evil person but to disagree about how Stalin came to be evil. It could have been because he was mistreated as a child, or because he had a genetic defect, or because he suffered some kind of brain injury, or because he was corrupted by absolute power, or because of some combination of these conditions[...]. These varied attempts to identify the causes of a particular case of evil personhood show that evil personhood itself is not always intended to provide a complete explanation of actions. It is true that people who use the concept of evil personhood as if it provided a complete

¹¹³ Ibid. 179.

explanation of actions are making a mistake, but it is also true that many people use that concept without falling into this error.¹¹⁴

The difficulty is that Russell himself invalidates this last claim. If Stalin acted as he did because he was evil, and he was evil because of a certain set of circumstances, it is unclear why evil is a necessary step. Stalin acted as he did because of a certain set of circumstances. Evil functions as an expression of condemnation, but as an explanation it is content-free.

Russell argues against Philip Cole for the preservation of evil as a category of behaviour, personhood, and disposition on the grounds that even if it has no explanatory value, we allow purely evaluative concepts like good and bad to inform our thinking¹¹⁵; that even if it has only partially explanatory value, we describe actions as compassionate in the belief that this has something to do with the motivation of the actor, but without any expectation that this is the full explanation¹¹⁶; and that even if the idea of evil can be misused, he likens it to other concepts, such as duty or heroism, which are often harmfully misused but still have a legitimate role in philosophical thought. But all of the concepts to which Russell likens evil are qualitatively different from evil as he describes it, and as it has been taken up in Western culture, in a number of ways. First of all, duty and heroism and compassion are laudatory concepts, which means that they can be feasibly applied to actions ascribed to people just like us. Evil, on the other hand, expresses a fundamental rejection. Evil is never "us"; those who define it, such as Russell, Kekes, Parkin, and Pocock,

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 205.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 197.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 198.

emphasize its incomprehensibility, its transgressions of fundamental human decency, its relegation of perpetrators to a space outside of the ordinary rules of cause and conscience. By definition it is always "them," and that alone should make it suspect. Secondly, unlike the others, it is not just an evaluative term, but a moral extreme. Thirdly, in the case of duty and heroism and their potential for misuse, it is difficult to see how they can be harmfully misused *in the absence of a concept such as evil, which would justify harm*. Even the Milgram experiment, which Russell uses as his illustration of the harmful potential of the concept of duty, involved shocks being administered *punitively*, albeit for mistakes in recall rather than morally culpable wrongs.

Russell defends the concept of evil on the grounds that first and foremost it is useful as an expression of very strong condemnation, and secondly that many folk accounts of morality find it useful. He charges that the misgivings Cole expresses about its use are more appropriately applied to its *misuse*; that many philosophers are able to apply it without misusing it. However, Russell is mistaken in his reformulation of Cole's argument. He says that Cole suggests "that use of the concept of evil introduces an unrealistic dualism, a binary opposition between good and evil people that does not conform with the moral facts."¹¹⁷ He reinterprets this to say that "people who use the concept of evil are thereby forced to sort people into two *and only two* categories--good and evil--and that those two categories alone are inadequate."¹¹⁸ He rejoins, "Yet Cole has given us no reason to believe that the use of the concept of evil somehow prevents us from deploying a whole range of other moral concepts that allow us to evaluate persons, motives, and actions across a

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 223.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 223.

spectrum stretching between the extremities of heroic moral virtue and evil."¹¹⁹ Russell argues that evil should not be viewed as an extreme point on a behavioural scale, because then no action and no person would be rightly considered evil, as there would always be the possibility that something or someone could be just a little bit worse; evil is rather the end *zone* of the moral spectrum of human behaviour.¹²⁰ Under his own scheme, it is not necessary that a problematic binary posit the existence of extreme good pitted against extreme evil; it is sufficient to have the everyday, the basically good, the neutral pitted against this end zone occupied by evil deeds and evil people. Everyday life *becomes* good through contrast with this end zone, and this of course is one of the temptations that a belief in evil presents.

However, Russell takes issue with Cole's insight that the discourse of evil overlays human behaviour with a patina of the supernatural. He says that if this is the case, then it is so in a very limited sense:

On a more fine-grained level, it could be that people who watch horror movies or read fantasy fiction are more inclined to believe that the word 'evil' has supernatural connotations. If hypotheses such as these are correct, then we should be able to discover stable differences in linguistic practice between these groups, and we could expect members of the same cultural group to be more likely to use the word 'evil' in similar ways. The discovery of such patterns might lead us to conclude that there is not a single unified concept of evil that is used by the folk, but

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 223.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 65.

that there are several similar but distinct folk concepts, all of which go by the name 'evil.'¹²¹

Russell does show that evil is actually a constellation of folk concepts, but seems to mistake Cole's attribution of supernatural connotations to evil for an attribution of the outright supernatural.¹²² Perhaps rather than supernatural, it would be better to speak in terms of the mythical, or to take a page from Desilet, the melodramatic. However, the pattern holds, and contrary to Russell's assertion that this is a niche use of the idea of evil, even Kekes and Michael Ignatieff, secular thinkers who have devoted their professional lives to thinking seriously about ethics, argue that evil people have transcended the boundaries of what constitutes the human. They further claim that people and states are justified in taking actions that would ordinarily fall outside the realms of acceptable behaviour in order to contain, prevent, or punish evil.

Two of the works I examined deal with evil specifically as it appears in art, with the idea that art produces genuine insights into the nature of evil. Georges Bataille's *Literature and Evil* discusses evil--to Bataille, Evil--in the work of seven authors. Bataille's definition of Evil is never rendered explicit or even properly coherent. It is "an instinctive tendency towards divine intoxication which the rational world of calculation cannot bear."¹²³ It is "cognate with death".¹²⁴ It is "ecstasy"¹²⁵ and an "abyss"¹²⁶ and "poetry"¹²⁷ and "Energy"¹²⁸

¹²¹ Ibid. 96.

¹²² Ibid. 21.

¹²³ Georges Bataille (Alastair Hamilton, trans.), *Literature and Evil*, (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973), 9.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 16.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 47.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 47.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 61.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 72.

and “liberty”¹²⁹ and “misfortune”¹³⁰ and “violation of the law”.¹³¹ There is a temptation to say that Bataille embraces what Luke Russell calls the psychologically thick concept of evil, whereby evil lies not in the deed itself but in a certain psychological hallmark of the person doing the deed. However, an evil to which Bataille attributes so many positively valued qualities is not moral evil. It is more akin to mythical evil, wherein evil is dictated by the needs of the story, but it would be most accurate of all to say that Bataille is presenting the reader with a portrait--or perhaps several portraits--of aesthetic evil, a shifting unknown quantity that is both repulsive and tempting in its repulsiveness, but ultimately of limited utility to the present enterprise.

Paul Oppenheimer, whose 1996 book *Evil and the Demonic* defines evil as “that which wreaks havoc in an environment conducive to annihilation”¹³², uses examples from film to argue that representations of evil combine several motifs: fragmentation, redundancy, a heart of silence in which communication is meaningless or impossible, and finally:

Lavish wealth, elegance that stupefies the mind and eye or gruesome poverty, disease, filth, opulence that disputes with depravity, along with magnificent disorder, [that] startle[s] and snarl[s] all familiar and commonsensical efforts at comprehension [to] paralyse and seduce simultaneously: a dreadful boundlessness,

¹²⁹ Ibid. 74.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 120.

¹³¹ Ibid. 173.

¹³² Paul Oppenheimer, *Evil and the Demonic: A New Theory of Monstrous Behaviour* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1996), ix.

a sense that there are no limits to the place in which one finds oneself, no exits; and a desperate, ultimately terrifying eroticism, often allied with death and defiance[.]¹³³

Oppenheimer sees evil as something naturally sublime and transcendent:

This is the dilemma that no doubt lies at the heart of any effort at a definition, that evil reaches beyond the mundane and ordinarily comprehensible. So much at least does it share with goodness, or beauty, or suffering. Evil transcends, finally, the easily intelligible, in the sense that crucifixion, martyrdom, even piety defy common sense and even sanity, while suggesting that what can be comprehended by usual means simply cannot be all there is.¹³⁴

[...]

In the special world of evil, which incorporates the criminal world and yet reaches past it into social terror and cosmic defiance, death becomes a useful gateway to a new empire of horror that thrills and frightens with unnaturalness, gaudiness, uniqueness, grandiosity, beauty, and even misery--a pathos--beyond what reality ordinarily allows.¹³⁵

Further, he asserts that "The soul of the evil person, like Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, like Shakespeare's Iago, like the Gilles de Rais of Huysman's *Là-Bas*, has looked out on the

¹³³ Ibid. 7.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 5.

world, analysed its contents and meanings, and concluded that its chief meaning is death--most bitterly, personal death. He or she wants no part of it."¹³⁶

This idea of infinite will and boundless ambition has arisen again and again, but it seems confined to fictional portrayals.

It will also be useful to examine theories of evil that are rooted in actual events. Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* covers the trial of Adolf Eichmann, who from 1934 to 1945 was in charge of transporting Jewish people--first to British Palestine, which would later become Israel; then to other areas of German-occupied territory; and finally to labour camps, concentration camps, and death camps. Although he protested that he bore no ill will towards Jewish people, had never killed anyone, and was sickened by his tours of the death camps¹³⁷, he was responsible for carrying out instructions that he knew led to the deaths of millions. The prosecution, according to Arendt, tried to make Eichmann out to be a monster¹³⁸, but he was, rather, a bureaucrat whose crimes lay in his willingness to abdicate moral responsibility for actions that he himself found shocking, and to do his job to the best of his abilities despite its being an atrocity:

The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the

¹³⁶ Ibid. 4.

¹³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 87-88.

¹³⁸ Ibid. 54.

atrocities put together, for it implied [...] that this new type of criminal, who is in actual fact *hostis generis humani*, commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong.¹³⁹

Although Arendt does not excuse Eichmann for his crimes, she does in several places note the effect of a prevailing climate in support of good or ill--“the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society--not only in Germany but almost all countries, not only among the persecutors but also among the victims.”¹⁴⁰ However, Arendt also gives the example of Nazi officers living in Denmark, who, having witnessed Denmark’s open nonviolent resistance to Germany’s demands to institute anti-Semitic policies, suddenly became less willing to enforce those policies themselves.¹⁴¹ Arendt writes:

For the lesson of such stories is simple and within everybody’s grasp. Politically speaking, it is that under conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that ‘it could happen’ in most places *but it did not happen everywhere*. Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Ibid. 276.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 126.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 175.

¹⁴² Ibid. 233.

Arendt is a political theorist rather than a philosopher, and her solution to the problem of evil in all its banality is not personal or metaphysical, but political and judicial. She is critical of the use of Eichmann's trial to create narrative, calling it a show trial despite the best efforts of the judges. Eichmann's crimes were not just against the Jewish people, she argues, and she calls for the creation of an international criminal court to prosecute crimes against humanity.¹⁴³

Fred Katz, a concentration camp survivor, in his 1993 book *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguilings of Evil*, conceives of human behaviour as organized into "packages" and "riders":

At any one time, each of us has a number of different values. These values are the result of one's upbringing, one's learning and maturation process. [...] Some things are more important than others. Some things can be achieved right away, while others must be held in abeyance. Some things can be neglected. Others have priority and must be tackled immediately. In short, at any one time, our values are unequal. They are organized--they are *packaged*--in definite ways.

In addition, packaged values are often influenced by forces that act as *riders* to the entire package. A rider places an imprint on every item within a package.¹⁴⁴

Riders are sets of priorities that are more immediately important than other considerations. Katz uses the example of William Calley, an American army lieutenant in Viet Nam who had

¹⁴³ Ibid. 270.

¹⁴⁴ Fred E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguilings of Evil* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 38

previously been reprimanded for moving his troops through an area too slowly. Under immense stress, in a war where high body counts were valorized, among people who had been represented to them as less than human, and far from the social context where he and his men had learned their values, Calley ordered his men to kill whomever they encountered on their way through My Lai to facilitate their passage through.¹⁴⁵

Such isolated, stressed, brutal conditions, where efficiency takes precedence over lives that are not regarded as wholly human, can create what Katz calls a culture of cruelty, in which people compete to outdo each other. Workers in factories¹⁴⁶, he says, sometimes cope with repetitive and onerous work by creating fixed social structures specific to the factory setting, negotiating their own identity within those structures, and punishing those who fall outside of them. In the Third Reich, the work was far more horrifying, Katz says, but the pattern holds. The SS officers who staffed concentration camps were expected to kill, created identities, and competed with each other to commit outrages and atrocities. This presented opportunities for creativity and recognition that would not have been available to them in ordinary circumstances. Camp leaders would reframe men's misgivings by congratulating them on having the fortitude to overcome their revulsion and do a terrible but necessary job.¹⁴⁷ Only when the pressure was removed, when "normal" life resumed, did the horror of their deeds become clear to them. Katz' introduction of the idea of the "rider" is valuable, in that it shows how urgent practical considerations can, in times of extreme stress, supersede moral reasoning.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 28.

¹⁴⁶ To say nothing of high schools, also hotbeds of cruelty where people often cope by aligning themselves with specific identities.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 69.

Michael Ignatieff's *The Lesser Evil* (2004), deals with the responsibilities of democracies faced with the threat of terrorism. Ignatieff argues that suspensions of civil liberties may be a necessary component of anti-terrorism measures, but that these suspensions of rights should be regarded as "the lesser evil," done to prevent greater ones. He calls for the preservation of evil as a category because he wants it to be very clear that whether or not a state may consider its actions in this regard to be justified, they are still wrong--they are just less wrong than terrorism.

In the final two chapters of his book, Ignatieff's arguments take a disturbing turn that illustrates how pernicious the concept of evil, and of destroying evil at all costs, can be. In a chapter entitled "The Temptations of Nihilism," he begins with two *fictional* portrayals of terrorists, from Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, showing that they are motivated not by political goals but by fanaticism and apocalypticism.¹⁴⁸ His insight that Al Qaeda leaders "invert the normal psychological priorities of adherents, to make them think their own love of life and their scruple about taking the lives of others are forms of weakness to be overcome"¹⁴⁹ echoes Katz, but Ignatieff dismisses those who think this way as "wicked people."¹⁵⁰ Ignatieff acknowledges that civilians can passively benefit from imperialism and occupation¹⁵¹; that the West has had a history of exploiting non-Western countries for resources; and that "a liberal democracy cannot maintain its own identity in freedom if it rules others without their consent."¹⁵² At the same time, he alleges that Al-Qaeda

¹⁴⁸ Michael Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 125.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 126.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 127.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 128.

¹⁵² Ibid. 132.

...cannot be convinced to desist. They are in a deathly embrace with what they do, and argument cannot reach them. Nor can failure. [...] It is redemption they are after, and they seek death sure that they have attained it. They have nothing to negotiate for, and we have nothing to gain by negotiating with them. They will take gestures of conciliation as weakness and our desire to replace violence with dialogue as contemptible naïveté.¹⁵³

This echoes what Paul Oppenheimer has said about evil in film, while negating the possibility that Al Qaeda's hostility towards the West is rooted in legitimate grievances.

In his chapter "Liberty and Armageddon," Ignatieff considers the possibility of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction. He does not consider those protesting an occupation likely to perpetrate this kind of terrorism, but says that loners, nihilists, and Al Qaeda all pose a threat that is essentially undeterrable.¹⁵⁴ He writes of the latter:

Since their goal is not the acquisition of power itself but the punishment of the United States and its strategic allies, they cannot be stopped by political negotiation, concession, or appeasement. Nor are they susceptible to the incentives that make some armed groups conform to the laws of war in order to achieve international recognition or legitimacy.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Ibid. 131.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 150.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 150.

Ignatieff's solution is to have the United States lead the world in regulating trade, science, and rogue states, resorting to "lesser evils" such as pre-emptive strikes and torture¹⁵⁶ He charges, "Those who think [Ignatieff's list of allowable forms of torture] allows too much probably underestimate just how important accurate and timely information can be in a war on terror, and just how resistant terror suspects can be." Ignatieff's appeal to consequences, often framed as grounds for making exceptions to an anti-torture stance, ignores that the information torture yields is unreliable.¹⁵⁷ Like Kekes, in other words, Ignatieff undercuts his claim to the moral high ground by introducing exceptions who can legitimately be subjected to what would be atrocities in any other context because they are fundamentally different from ordinary human beings, having joined "a cult of death and sacrifice."¹⁵⁸ (Note the use of language that evokes witch trials, blood libel, and the Satanic Panic, among other things.) Conveniently, for Ignatieff these intractable enemies take the form of what was, at the time of writing, an enemy against which the Western world was trying to marshal its resources. While he acknowledges that terrorism can arise out of legitimate political grievances, he downplays the roles of economic imperialism and systemic injustice, and in doing so makes Al-Qaeda into a an organization against which no measure is too extreme--provided that said measure is framed as a "lesser evil."

Valerie Hartouni, in *Visualizing Atrocity: Arendt, Evil, and the Optics of Thoughtlessness* (2012), responds to Hannah Arendt and her critics, crediting Arendt with complicating and undermining the oversimplified narrative of the Holocaust that Israel and

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 141.

¹⁵⁷ Mark A. Costanzo, "The Effects and Effectiveness of Using Torture as an Interrogation Device: Using Research to Inform the Policy Debate" (*Social Issues and Policy Review* 3:1 [2009]) 179-210, 183 <https://www.cgu.edu/pdffiles/sbos/costanzo_effects_of_interrogation.pdf>

¹⁵⁸ Ignatieff 124.

the Allies were attempting to create. Hartouni points out that the Nuremberg trials and the Eichmann trial were at least in part narrative-building exercises that worked to strengthen the national identities of the prosecuting nations, to quarantine Nazi Germany as an aberration, and to “allow the aggrieved but victorious nations to clearly distinguish themselves in character and kind from German with its deadly nationalism, brutish militarism, and savage program of imperialist plunder.”¹⁵⁹ She discusses the role that shocking images of atrocities from documentary footage of the concentration camps played, and continue to play, in that process:

They continue to configure the narrative field, insisting on and guaranteeing a set of stories and allegiances that resist reframing, indeed that indict reframing as revisionist and an affront to the memory of the dead. And of course it is not the images per se but the now largely invisible legal, political, and visual apparatuses that animate and circumscribe their semiotic context. These apparatuses continue to underwrite their privileged status, naturalize their meaning, and authorize them to speak in ways that appear unmediated, indeed in ways that continue to precipitate in spectators a sense of traumatic rupture, of terror and fear as well as silence and shame, alternative read and rendered by some as the necessary core of a historical consciousness that recognizes the inadequacy of historical knowledge. If these images continue to carry with them the imperative to look, with its attendant renunciations, they also significantly entail a prohibition against seeing or seeing specifically beyond the frame. For within this economy of meaning to move beyond

¹⁵⁹ Valerie Hartouni, *Visualizing Atrocity: Arendt, Evil, and the Optics of Thoughtlessness* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 111.

the frame of the image is to fail in the end to grasp fully the sublime evil captured within it.¹⁶⁰

Hartouni notes that the power of such images and the narrative constructed with them may have been a necessary component in recovery from the war, but it dominates our understanding of what genocide looks like to such a degree that it keeps us from recognizing other genocides until after the fact, and from acknowledging the role that we ourselves play in them:

Terror, traumatic loss, eliminationist anti-Semitism, administrative murder, the fact of the camps, structures of dictatorship, the criminal state—all these things are held to be definitive and unique features of the totalitarian moment; and against all of any of these features, it is said often quite vehemently, ‘We are not that.’[...] This has postponed a difficult accounting and understanding of the radical, indeed lethal, potential of mostly obscure practices and processes that we, inhabiting late modernity, do indeed share with *that* earlier and otherwise quarantined period—instrumental and utilitarian rationalities, for example, along with the rational calculation of accumulation and waste; knowledge producing and collecting apparatus, along with systems of classification so essential to organizing and administering populations; institutionalized mechanisms that both rationalize the

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 113.

production of superfluous people and naturalize the distribution of what Ophir calls 'superfluous suffering.'¹⁶¹

Hartouni notes that "maintaining factories, jobs, and life as usual in one country [...] most often entails supplying the guns bullets, and poison gas of genocide in another"¹⁶² and that we need to understand and foreground "the ways the ten-dollar sweatshirt on offer at Wal-Mart presupposes ever-growing numbers of displaced and ultimately disposable workers as capital roams the globe (with security forces typically not far behind) in search of cheap, docile labor and unregulated, which is to say, 'business-friendly' environments."¹⁶³ In other words, this is a case in which resorting to the discourse of evil to describe one kind of atrocity makes us reluctant to recognize atrocities that do not meet precisely the same conditions.

In all cases, the word "evil" appears to be applied to extremely bad actions, the people who perpetrate them, and the motives from which they operate. In theory, "evil" is not a category of behavior so much as a particularly extreme subset of bad behavior; an indicator of degree rather than of content. It is behavior which is deemed not just worse, but also more culpable. Although those such as Kekes and Russell acknowledge that external factors can contribute to behavior that they call evil, they cite cases in which other people in the same circumstances have acted differently, as proof that evil is

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 123-124.

¹⁶² Ibid. 124.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 124.

something additional. According to Russell, this something additional can be introduced by mundane external factors such as abuse or organic disorder, but it is still culpable.

In practice, behavior deemed to be evil, people deemed to be evil, and motives deemed to be evil are treated as *qualitatively* different. According to Pocock, “the word ‘evil’ has, for the majority, a totalizing force that, we can properly say, makes ‘evil people’ monsters in the sense that they are denied all admirable human attributes such as love or loyalty.”¹⁶⁴ For Kekes, the limits of decent human behavior can be suspended for such people: “They may be justifiably violated in war, defense against terrorism, or the punishment of evildoers. In such cases, serious harm is caused, but it is justifiable, provided it is not excessive and malevolent.”¹⁶⁵ He calls for “condemnation [...] not primarily of the evil actions, but of the people whose actions they are and for being the kind of persons they are.”¹⁶⁶ For Ignatieff, those who are responsible for evil actions are “carnivores”¹⁶⁷ who can justifiably be assassinated¹⁶⁸ or tortured¹⁶⁹ Even David Parkin, who believes that the concept of evil is necessary in order to have any morality at all, acknowledges that this predisposes one to binary thinking:

Dualistic and semi-dualistic theodicies entail a notion of separable and therefore absolute evil. But it is when we talk of moral rather than descriptive evil, of human rather than cosmic wrongdoing, that the discourse reveals a vocabulary of dichotomous absolutes: is the heinous act explicable or inexplicable, intended or

¹⁶⁴ Pocock 51.

¹⁶⁵ Kekes 192.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 203.

¹⁶⁷ Ignatieff 144.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 133.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 141.

unintended, remediable or irremediable, forgiveable or unforgiveable, and so on?

Or is evil, as in the minds of some people, always only one or the other?¹⁷⁰

It is clear that “evil” is a very loaded term. Russell argues for its preservation because people find it useful as a term of condemnation. He rejects the alternative “atrociousness” on the grounds that an atrocity is a harm, and some kinds of evil may be harmless. I have already argued that the idea of harmless evil constitutes a powerful argument that “evil” as a moral judgement is essentially content-free.

I prefer the term “atrocity” to describe acts or events that invite the use of the term “evil.” It is a clear condemnation of the act itself, without evil’s mythical or dehumanizing baggage. Ordinary people may participate in atrocities, and may admit to participating in and benefiting from atrocities, without taking on the weight of evil.

One might ask, why would I wish to spare people that weight? As Hartouni shows, people resist identification with evil. Theories that defend the preservation of evil as a concept in ethics tend to focus on explanations for why an individual would act in a certain harmful way; only Lara, Arendt, Eagleton, Hartouni, and Cole make serious attempts to understand systems that do harm. In the case of systemic injustices, there may be other apparatuses in place to shift blame away from those who benefit from atrocities, indeed to keep them from seeing the consequences of their actions at all. “Evil” may be an emotionally satisfying term of condemnation, but it is always for other people. In addition to a conviction that the discourse of evil does immeasurably more harm than good, and that no actions should be able to place one outside of the sphere of humanity, I do not want to

¹⁷⁰ Parkin, “Introduction” 11.

make it easier for people to look away—to have atrocities continue because the preferred way of making sense of them involves the deployment of a discourse that implies the worthlessness or irredeemability of those who participate or benefit. We have seen that according to several respected secular philosophers and political theorists, evil people, and those responsible for evil acts, deserve the strongest possible condemnation; that for them the ordinary rules governing human relations are suspended. Is anyone willing to say that they deserve this for themselves—even if they become aware that their mundane, ordinary lives are possible because of the exploitation, dehumanization, and misery of their fellow human beings? Dispensing with the discourse of evil removes questions of blame, of motive, of depravity, of punishment—or at least lets these questions stand at a safe distance. Assigning culpability or debating the ontological status of the perpetrator of a harmful act should be far subordinate to making that act stop.

Russell dismisses Cole's claim that the radical outsideness posited by the discourse of evil carries with it supernatural connotations, and it is true that philosophers who argue for the use of evil as a category tend not to argue from a position of belief in the supernatural. However, even if we reject the idea that calling something evil places it in a supernatural framework, there is still a strong argument that it places it in a mythic framework—Desilet would say a melodramatic framework.

Taking a page from Russell, let us turn to what it means to judge someone or something to be evil. It is to remove them from the ordinary world of cause and effect and instrumentality—to invalidate their stated goals and reasons for acting. Mere badness permits careful scrutiny, an acknowledgement of complexity, and often a compassionate response. But when an action or person is judged evil, they are effectively outside of the

realm of compassion. Even for Kekes and others who have devoted their lives to thinking carefully about these things, evil calls for a suspension of the ordinary rules of a just society in order that it may be contained and punished. And for many laypeople, to call something evil is to call for its outright eradication.

This brings me to what I believe is a very important point. Perhaps my own choices are at fault—my selections barely scratch the surface of the vast and fairly recent body of work on evil—and certainly I support the study of literature and other creative forms to explore all aspects the (post)human condition. But I do find it disturbing that of the works I sampled, so many look to fiction as if it were naturally an authority. If evil is responsible for human suffering, and human suffering is pervasive, why do so many authors working with the subject find it necessary to turn to literature for illustrative examples? The present study, of course, is concerned with fiction, but it is one thing to set out to study evil in fiction, and quite another to profess to study evil in the world and draw the bulk of one's examples from fiction.

Oppenheimer supports his own decision to use film thus:

[T]he perfection of cinematography over the past one hundred years has led to a cinematic, or at least cinema-influenced, perception of reality for vast numbers of people. It would, I believe, be as foolhardy to ignore this way of embracing matters of importance as to scant any art that succeeds in externalizing the dreams and terrors of the subconscious.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Oppenheimer ix.

The trouble with this—with any definition that relies heavily on creative works—is the tendency to conflate moral and mythical evil, or, if one likes, the world as it is and the world as we imagine it to be. The dreams and terrors of the subconscious tell us about our own fears; whether they shed light on the processes that allow human beings to harm one another is debatable. The elements that make for a stirring narrative are not always the elements that give us genuine insight, and real people's reasons for doing harm may be very different from the reasons that nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors who enjoy a level of privilege that allows them to write and publish novels might imagine.

The conflation of moral evil and mythical evil arguably results, itself, in great harm. The idea that evil is outside of the realm of the sensible, rational, and instrumental may prevent the acknowledgment of the sensible, rational, and instrumental reasons for actions that have been branded as evil, as is the case currently with much of the discourse surrounding crime and terrorism. Further, the absence of the supposed markers of mythical evil may serve as one's own justification for committing, supporting, or benefitting from heinous acts, as was arguably the case with Adolf Eichmann, and perhaps continues to be the case with millions of Western consumers, who may feel unease with slavery and sweatshops but continue to benefit from them.

"Evil" remains a powerful term of condemnation, and is perhaps useful and even therapeutic in many contexts. However, I hope that the above makes it clear that there are dangers associated with the preservation of evil as a serious epistemic category outside of fiction.

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One of the ways in which the fantasy genre functions in prose is to turn recognizable human beings into heroes, a process that can be immensely satisfying and empowering for the reader. However, this process of being the hero of one's own story is not necessarily coterminous with the process of being morally good; and conversely, the dragon one faces is not necessarily morally bad. In fact, it would be entirely possible to build a world around either kind of evil, exclusive to the other. The strictly realistic novel deals with the first; an author such as H.P. Lovecraft deals with the second. Tolkien connects the two, and in a discussion of fantasy, it is these mythical implications that I want to discuss. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a lexicon that reflects the use of evil in texts.

I will speak of **elemental evil** when I wish to refer to "pure" evil, the mythical Satanic (or Melkoric, or Torakic, or Rakoth Maugrimic) force that is so often a source of antagonism in high fantasy. Elemental evil often operates through characters who are **essentially evil**, who for whatever reason possess an evil essence, whose reasons for acting as they do are inextricably bound up with their badness. **Biological evil** attributes culpable evil to inborn characteristics such as species or "race," whereas **functional evil** is based on actions. **Moral evil** is moral wrong that the text frames as evil, and a **villain** is an antagonist that the text frames as evil. **Mythical evil**, as I have said before, exists for the sake of the narrative, for the heroes to fight. It need not be morally wrong.

However, these terms do not sit comfortably in all fantasy texts. In some texts, it is more appropriate to talk about **moral wrong**, which does not necessarily partake of ideas of evil, and **antagonism**, when characters pursue their own interests in ways that frustrate, hinder, or even harm the protagonists, without this pursuit being framed as evil.

A final type, **natural evil**, has no moral component, no culpability attached. It is "that which causes suffering, which intrudes on what we think ought to be the rightful course of events, and maims or cuts short any life well before it has fulfilled its natural cycle."¹⁷² Roger Ellwood includes among this kind of evil supernovas, black holes, and natural disasters.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the origins of the fantasy genre, beginning with the nineteenth century and ending with a detailed discussion of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, the Christian roots of its portrayal of evil, and its impact. Chapter 3 will look at high fantasy and how it developed as a marketing category, and show, through a few examples discussed in brief, how moral and mythical evil tend to be bound up with each other in ways that are fascinating and sometimes troubling. Chapter 4 will examine urban fantasy from its birth as a genre in the early 1980s to the present day, also looking briefly at some examples. Here, too, moral and mythical evil are often conflated, but in more complex ways. From there, I will move into studies of individual authors and the treatment of evil in their work. Chapter 5 will focus on the work of Charles de Lint, Chapter 6 on that of Mercedes Lackey, Chapter 7 that of Kelley Armstrong, and Chapter 8 that of China Miéville. Chapter 9 will present my conclusions.

My goal in doing this work is not to disparage any genre of fiction, or to suggest that some subgenres are better or more responsible than others. However, I do hope that, having shown the extent to which our ideas about evil are drawn from fiction, I can demonstrate the benefits of being critical about the depiction of evil in fantasy fiction, the

¹⁷² Ellwood 2.

way that key urban fantasy authors have negotiated evil in their own work, and the role that the urban setting plays in that negotiation.

Chapter 2: The Story of Fantasy I: From Fairy Tales to Tolkien

In the eighteenth century, European folk- and fairy tales were harnessed by the upper and middle classes, and made to carry the weight of an emerging sense of nationalism. These were the tales alleged to come from the common people, and from the beginning, collectors such as Charles Perrault and Wilhelm Grimm made editorial choices that they felt communicated a solid sense of the values of the countries from which they came. As such, fairy tales also became a tool of personal development.

When fairy tales became identified with children, the question of the values in fairy tales became pressing to adults. Anxiety over what children are being exposed to has the power to make people extraordinarily excited about the source of the exposure. John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau denounced fairy tales as childish nonsense that would fill young people's heads with superstition and frivolity.¹⁷³ But fairy tales also had a band of fierce defenders, who, apart from or in addition to any nation-building exercise, saw them as a way of cultivating the imagination¹⁷⁴ and keeping alive the best of a previous age--of magic or of youth, depending on the defender. Some went so far as to write their own tales. Among these in England were writers William Beckford, Sara Coleridge, Charles Dickens, and George MacDonald, all of whom took advantage of the burgeoning popular press.

John Clute identifies the scientific revolution in 16th-century Western Europe as the catalyst for the development of the fantastic mode in literature, saying:

¹⁷³ Eilers 320.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 322.

There is no easy division between realism and the fantastical in writers before 1600 or so, and no genre of written literature, before about the early 19th century seems to have been constituted so as deliberately to confront or contradict the ‘real.’

Though fantasy certainly existed for many centuries before, whenever stories were told which were understood by their authors (and readers) as being impossible, it is quite something else to suggest that the perceived impossibility of these stories *was their point*--that they stood as a counter-statement to a dominant worldview.¹⁷⁵

This places fantasy in proximity to the gothic and the uncanny. Although Michelle Eilers argues against this idea in favour of one that stresses the relationship between fairy tales and fantasy, it is worth noting that the difference between early fantasy and the gothic is largely one of tone. In fantasy, remember, the supernatural is greeted with wonder rather than with terror.

In a book of essays and a pair of anthologies that straddled the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, (*Literary Hours* [1798], *Tales of Terror* [1799], and *Tales of Wonder* [1800]), Nathan Drake distinguishes between the “terrible” and “sportive” strands of the Gothic, organized around the ghost and the fairy respectively¹⁷⁶. In his illustrative story “Henry Fitzowen,” a knight who journeys to a castle to rescue his kidnapped beloved first spends a night tormented by ghosts, after which he and his bride are recompensed for their sufferings by fairies who give them succor in their glade, and dance for them. In other words, the sportive is the reward for the terrible. Terror is its own source of conflict, and

¹⁷⁵ John Clute, “Fantasy,” *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, eds. John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), 338.

¹⁷⁶ Brian Stableford, ed., *The Dedalus Book of British Fantasy: The 19th Century* (Sawtry, Cambridgeshire: Dedalus, 1991), 39.

can get along just fine on its own, but Drake's work raises the problem of what to do with wonder.

Near the turn of the twentieth century, English writers were finding success with fantasy in a longer format. Lewis Carroll's Alice books are early successes from 1865, although some fantasy scholars exclude them from the genre because they narrate dreams. Scottish author George MacDonald is perhaps better known for his children's books, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *The Princess and Curdie*, and *At the Back of the North Wind*, but his adult fantasies *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895) are equally notable. *Phantastes*, hailed by *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* as the first adult fantasy¹⁷⁷, tells the coming-of-age story of Anodos, a man who, on the day after his twenty-first birthday, finds a passage to Faerie. He seeks a beautiful woman, a statue who was animated by his music, but in his travels breaks a taboo and acquires a dark shadow that compels him to do evil things. There are clear parallels between Anodos' shadow and the Christian concept of original sin. A theme in MacDonald's work is that evil results from characters looking where they are not supposed to. Anodos opens a door he was forbidden to open¹⁷⁸; in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), Nanny, one of the child characters, has a dream in which she tries to get a peek at the lady in the moon's box of bees, and releases them, wreaking havoc and causing her expulsion from the moon.¹⁷⁹

An English author who wrote longer fantasy was William Morris. In *The Well At Worlds' End* (1896), Prince Ralph travels through a world patterned on medieval Europe to

¹⁷⁷ Eilers 318.

¹⁷⁸ George MacDonald, *Phantastes*. 15 December 2015. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/325/325-h/325-h.htm>>. Chapter 8.

¹⁷⁹ George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind*, 15 July 2013 <<http://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/18614.txt>>.

seek the titular well. As he quests, he has several smaller adventures. Lin Carter and John Gregory Betancourt identify this as the first fantasy set in a proper secondary world, as opposed to humanity's past, or a non-European country.¹⁸⁰

Edith Nesbit was another English writer of children's fantasy at the turn of the twentieth century. *Five Children and It* was serialized in *The Strand* before being collected into a book published in 1902, and the next two followed in 1904 and 1906. The books of the Psammead trilogy are what Mendlesohn calls intrusion fantasy. The final two books take place in London and are arguably early examples of urban fantasy.

Yet another successful author from the turn of the century was the Welsh clergyman Arthur Machen, in whose longer stories fairies are a source of atavistic horror. Stories such as "The Novel of the Black Seal" (1895) and "The Great God Pan" (1894) sit at the intersection of fantasy, horror, and mystery, and are sustained largely by the latter. The puzzle set out by the narrative is solved only in the last few pages, as the picture is made complete. John Cawelti has noted that the mystery was another genre that initially struggled with longer stories¹⁸¹, and although Machen's works manage novella length fairly well, his novel *The Hill of Dreams* (1907) is a description of the protagonist's drug-induced vision, oddly compelling but virtually plotless.

While some of the first novels to be written in America, such as Charles Brockden Brown's *Weiland* and the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, partook of the gothic tradition, Brian Attebery has pointed out that a recognizable fantasy genre took some time to develop. Early fantasy writers such as Frank Stockton and Edgar Allan Poe often set their

¹⁸⁰ Lin Carter and John Gregory Betancourt, introduction, *The Well at World's End*, vol. 1 by William Morris, eds. Lin Carter and John Gregory Betancourt (Berkeley Heights NJ: Wildside Press, 2000), vii. It is unclear what Carter and Betancourt made of *Phantastes'* Faerie from the previous year.

¹⁸¹ Cawelti 109.

work in Europe, and Attebery adds that “Writers who tried to transport fairy materials to this continent were not so successful.”¹⁸² He theorizes that the reason for this was in part “a fundamental bias against the folklore of [that] country” that “leaves the fantasist cut off from the stock of magical images and events that abound in European tales and legends, from which the British fantasists have drawn so much”¹⁸³; in part that the public imagination was invested in America itself: why write about fantastic lands when you lived in one? Attebery points to L. Frank Baum’s Oz novels (1900-1920) as the true emergence of fantasy in America--the moment when utopia seemed far enough away that imagination could be used for play rather than work.¹⁸⁴ There may also have been a sense that setting fantasy on home territory was at best doomed to mundanity, and at worst, inappropriate.

An important factor in the growth of American fantasy was the pulp magazines. The pulp industry began with general fiction magazines such as *Argosy* and *The Popular Magazine*, and as time progressed, produced increasingly specialized titles, such as *Weird Tales*, *Dime Detective*, and *Black Mask*. Science fiction became a distinct genre in the pulps, enabling it to retroactively claim such authors as H.G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, and Mary Shelley. Fantasy, likewise, developed as a genre in the pulps. Specifically, the sword-and-sorcery subgenre, detailing the adventures of heroes in prehistoric kingdoms or distant lands, had an episodic structure well suited to the pulps. Conan the Barbarian and Kull the Conqueror, both creations of Robert E. Howard and paradigmatic examples of sword-and-sorcery, first emerged in *Weird Tales* magazine.

¹⁸² Brian Attebery, *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 74.

¹⁸³ Ibid. vii.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 87-88.

Weird Tales also played host to the work of H.P. Lovecraft, an American writer deeply influenced by Poe, Machen, and others. Although Lovecraft is best characterized as a horror and science fiction writer, it is worth noting that he was among the first American writers to invest an explicitly American landscape--his native New England--with the trappings of the uncanny.¹⁸⁵ In addition to the many New England landscapes he describes in loving detail, even as he infects them with alien plague, "The Horror at Red Hook" (1925) uses New York City's multiculturalism as an entry point for horror, while "Pickman's Model" (1926) houses ghouls in the subway system. Lovecraft's masterpiece "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926) follows the narrative model Arthur Machen set out in "The Great God Pan," with its disparate elements coming together to create a complete, horrific realization, but Lovecraft, too, never published anything longer than a novella.

What early fantasy has in common--both the longer works and the shorter stories on both sides of the ocean--is a structure confined to short episodes. Alice's dream adventures bleed into one another, and each book has only a minimal, perfunctory story arc that Alice herself can do nothing to advance. The first book of Edith Nesbit's *Psammead* trilogy is purely episodic--the children get one wish a day, with the episode's conflict created by the unforeseen consequences--and while the third book involves a quest, it too is composed of discrete episodes. *At the Back of the North Wind* is a series of linked narratives: Diamond's episodic adventures with the North Wind and on the streets of London, two dreams, and a fairy tale. Prince Ralph and Anodos have goals, and their stories are roughly shaped by their quests, but their stories too are episodic in nature, with little to sustain narrative tension.

¹⁸⁵ Poe's work makes Europe the site of the supernatural; Hawthorne's work finds sublime beauty in America, but in the examples of his fantasy that I have read, the wonders are Greek.

One can contrast this to the Gothic novel, which did get longer. Although Ann Radcliffe's novels tend to be episodic, novels such as *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Frankenstein* (1818), *Dracula* (1897), and *The Woman in White* (1859) have plots that consist of much longer story arcs.¹⁸⁶ And although these all fell, to varying degrees, into the fuzzy set of the Gothic at the time, they are on the outermost edges of the fuzzy set of fantasy, and have come to be more solidly located in other genres as we currently conceive them--romance, science fiction, horror, and mystery, respectively. The works that are retroactively placed more centrally in the fuzzy set of fantasy maintain an episodic quality until well into the twentieth century.

One factor in this was arguably the structure of the source material, the fairy tale. I argue that another constraint was the tension between story arc and tone. One way of sustaining a tone of wonder throughout a story is to make it short; a single antagonist who presents an escalating threat risks shifting the tone from wonder to horror, and landing the work squarely in the realm of the Gothic.

J.R.R. Tolkien brought to the Lord of the Rings trilogy a set of concerns that made the question of tone--and in a sense, even genre--moot. One of these concerns was the creation--out of other Western European source material--of a distinctly English mythology. The focus on myth, rather than fairy tale, gave him a much broader register of tones to work with. Myths are allowed to deal in visceral horror in a way that fairy tales,

¹⁸⁶ What separates Lovecraft's and Machen's work from the gothic, which would have supported a longer structure, is that as with mysteries, the culmination of the story is the revelation of what is actually going on. Unlike mysteries--in which the next steps are omitted because they are known to the reader--the next steps are unfathomable. One can conquer Dracula, but one cannot conquer Cthulhu; that is part of the horror of him. One cannot even conquer Machen's fairies: the fairies of folklore are too powerful to fight and must be defeated by appeals to their more civilized sensibilities--with bargains, or contests of wit--but Machen's fairies do not have civilized sensibilities. They are a monstrous colonized Other, given all the powers of the Fair Folk and transplanted to land thought of as British.

stripped of any sacred qualities and expected to be palatable for children, cannot. Moreover, myth is expected to resonate on a cultural level, so it could be expected to depict different dangers, different anxieties, and different ways of overcoming adversity, and it is situated in a way that allows it to define good and evil, instead of merely illustrating existing concepts of it.

Linked to this are the other purposes that Tolkien himself set out for fantasy: escape, recovery, and the consolation of eucatastrophe. Fantasy, according to him, is supposed to present an alternative to this world that deepens our understanding of it.¹⁸⁷ This too allows it to stray beyond the realms of the picturesque. It was probably intended to be descriptive as much as it was prescriptive, something he saw the fantasy of his time already doing, and therefore the argument that this admonition was grounds for the radical change he wrought in the genre is not watertight. But the West had changed since the time of the fantasists who had influenced Tolkien. The staunch Protestant values of authors such as George MacDonald were thrown into question after two world wars and the collapse of the British Empire. William Morris' and Edith Nesbit's socialist utopian dream could not weather the reality of Stalinism. It may well be that escape, recovery, and consolation were exactly what Tolkien and his generation of readers got from the fantasy works of these authors, but to fulfill the same function in a twentieth-century world, fantasy needed teeth.

The Hobbit, published for children in 1937, has typical fairy tale creatures in it: trolls, goblins, a dragon. Against them it sets not questing humans, but a particularly reluctant hobbit and thirteen virtually interchangeable dwarves. Rather than searching for

¹⁸⁷ It is a little troubling to read the criticism of China Mieville's work that contrasts the two authors by charging that Mieville is interested in challenging the status quo, and Tolkien never was.

glory or the impossible or even the treasure that the dwarves seek, Bilbo's ultimate goal is to get home again and drink his tea unmolested. This has a number of effects on the text. First of all, although the protagonist is not human, his misery lends the narrative a degree of realism that its predecessors lack. Secondly, Bilbo's humble aspirations allow Tolkien to link him to his own ideas of the good: he does not seek out adventure and is not particularly tempted by wealth, but there is a part of him that yearns for something beyond the Shire, and another part still that is willing to wade into danger in order to do right, and still another part with a very English understanding of duty, and these end up making him a useful, if reluctant, questor.

Finally, Bilbo's desire to get home manages to sustain a degree of narrative tension uncharacteristic of fantasy before this. Instead of discrete episodes, the hobbit and his compatriots are plunged into crisis after crisis. The antagonism, although it hails from a variety of sources, is virtually unrelenting. Tolkien tells the reader explicitly, "Now it is a strange thing, but things that are good to have and days that are good to spend are soon told about, and not much to listen to; while things that are uncomfortable, palpitating, and even gruesome, may make a good tale, and take a deal of telling anyway,"¹⁸⁸ and through the protagonist he does a very good job of reinforcing it. The misery of Bilbo has a salutary effect on the story: *The Hobbit* is not a picturesque catalogue of wonders, and Bilbo's distress continually reminds the reader that there is something that he must do before he can return to the comfort of his home.

The elements of evil in the Lord of the Rings trilogy are present in their infancy in *The Hobbit*. Mention is made of Sauron in the form of the Necromancer to the South. The

¹⁸⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Waterville ME: Large Print Press by arrangement with Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 88-89.

dragons, goblins, wargs, and trolls lay waste to the land and spoil what they touch, and goblins (who become orcs in the Lord of the Rings trilogy) in particular operate as a critique--pitched at a child's level--of modern technology and the minds behind it, being "cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted. They make no beautiful things, but they make many clever ones. [...] It is not unlikely that they invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once."¹⁸⁹ When the creatures are routed out, however, the landscape recovers in a matter of days. The only instance of serious wrongdoing by any of the main characters is Thorin Oakenshield's refusal to share the dragon's hoard, and this refusal has the serendipitous effect of bringing in several armies just in time to fight the goblin invasion. Evil, then, is a matter of species; the idea that these creatures were engendered by a being who is also responsible for corrupting ordinary folk comes later.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy, published from 1954 to 1955, is not aimed specifically at children (although Tolkien was adamant that "fairy stories" ought not to talk down to children). Tolkien had set *The Hobbit* in a world whose history, mythology, and languages he had already devoted much time to working out, and in his foreword he explains that before he produced a sequel, he wanted to have these entirely established.¹⁹⁰ With this richer background rooted in a Catholic cosmology--and, very likely, with the increasingly pressing nature of Tolkien's concerns about modernity--came a more sophisticated conception of evil. Middle Earth was beset by problems analogous to those that faced England of the twentieth century, and Tolkien gave these problems a mythical source, a figure of elemental evil who pursues corruption and destruction.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 106-107.

¹⁹⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, foreword, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (London: HarperCollins and Clío Press, 1990), N. pag.

Although only hints of it appear in the trilogy itself, *The Silmarillion*, published posthumously from Tolkien's notes in 1977, outlines Middle Earth's cosmology. The creator is Ilúvatar, a being virtually indistinguishable from the Christian God, the only exception being the latter's triune structure.¹⁹¹ His agents are the Ainur, or valar, who, Ralph Wood notes, are imbued with some of the qualities of Pagan polytheistic gods and goddesses of Europe and the Mediterranean.¹⁹² One of the valar is Melkor (or to the elves, Morgoth), who is proud and solitary:

He deprived himself of all communal reliance, even upon Ilúvatar. Thus did he grow impatient with the All-Father, refusing the proper call of sub-creation, wanting instead to create other beings on his own. He began to weave his own music into Ilúvatar's great symphony of creation. The result was an immense dissonance--so terrible, in fact, that the other valar were overwhelmed by Melkor's cacophony[.]¹⁹³

Tolkien says that Melkor "turned to subtlety in perverting to his own will all that he would use, until he became a liar without shame. He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness."¹⁹⁴ Melkor does not create original things, but twisted copies: trolls are a mockery of Ents, and orcs of Elves.¹⁹⁵ Sauron, the principal antagonist of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, is the most powerful of the Maiar who serve him.

¹⁹¹ Ralph C. Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-Earth* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 12.

¹⁹² Ibid. 14.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 50.

¹⁹⁴ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), 31.

¹⁹⁵ Wood 51.

As I said, very little of this appears in the Lord of the Rings trilogy itself, but this was the cosmology that Tolkien was working from.¹⁹⁶ Sauron serves as a Satanic figure who has devoted himself to the corruption of Ilúvatar's creatures, and who has made certain species inherently corrupt.

In the trilogy itself, as Ursula Le Guin puts it, the quest is not to find something, but to lose it. The life-saving invisibility ring from *The Hobbit* is revealed to be a tool of a much greater evil, beside which trolls and goblins and dragons pale. The worst a goblin can do is eat you; Sauron captures souls, and enslaves entire civilizations. He turns people's benevolent intentions against them and the ones they love. He despoils the land, and commits genocide against the Ents. His presence is so evil that it can be felt. Ralph Wood says that in the trilogy, "Ilúvatar's once-unharmful creation has been marred by an evil that corrupts not only the moral life of free creatures; it also lays waste to the natural order. [...] This world that was meant to teem with living things has been turned into a forbidding moor."¹⁹⁷ Sauron doesn't just devour and destroy; he *pollutes*. Both Ricoeur and Ellwood have identified pollution as one of the dimensions of mythical evil.

Richard Purtill has said that while many critics accept that the One Ring stands for power, a comparison of the power relationships in the novels show that the ring stands specifically for Satanic power.¹⁹⁸ This case can definitely be made. Tolkien was a devout Catholic, with his ideas about fantasy very bound up in his faith, and Melkor's story echoes

¹⁹⁶ It's very interesting to read studies of the trilogy that were published before *The Silmarillion*--especially those that deal with what they consider to be the religious aspects.

¹⁹⁷ Wood 21.

¹⁹⁸ Richard Purtill, *Lord of the Elves and Eldils: Fantasy and Philosophy in C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 110.

that of Satan. Sauron's role as a tempter of the powerful and corruptor of the innocent bears it out, as well as his ability to harness the souls of the Ringwraiths.

But fixing Sauron as Satanic and nothing else does an injustice to the text. Satan was so well-worn a villain even in the previous century that the American texts to feature him made him the dupe in Trickster stories, because the devil is one person it is morally permissible to cheat; and the British texts that featured him did so to highlight religious hypocrisy.¹⁹⁹ Alan MacFarlane's study of the use of the term "evil" in fourteenth-to-eighteenth-century Scottish parish records finds that in the contemporary literature of the United Kingdom the devil is treated with a sense of lightheartedness and frivolity: "he is a joker, God's ape, puny and weak, a trickster in a safe world."²⁰⁰ In fact, while Christianity remained more a part of the mainstream in America,²⁰¹ it was the crumbling of the moral system of which Satan was a part that seemed to cause the Victorians the most narratively fruitful anxiety. Sauron also has sources in much more recent anxieties: the souring of the grand Victorian narrative, progress. Twentieth-century British audiences had seen enlightened Western civilization spawn genocide, two world wars, and the despoiling of the environment through industry. Sauron sounds all of these notes to resonate with twentieth-century secular audiences--even those for whom Satan is an amusing fiction.

¹⁹⁹ See Richard Garnett's comic story "The Demon Pope" (1888) and James Hogg's *Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) in which the real horror comes not from the Satanic Gil-Martin himself, but protagonist Robert Wringhim's Calvinist fanaticism and hypocrisy, which allow him to commit murder while remaining assured of his moral correctness and salvation.

²⁰⁰ Alan MacFarlane, "The root of all evil," *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 68.

²⁰¹ Stephen Vincent Benét's "The Devil and Daniel Webster" (1936) is an example of Satan turning up as a villain in American literature; however, there is an argument to be made that he is only Satan because otherwise it would be wrong to trick him.

Tolkien identifies the appearance of the Ringwraiths as the point in his writing where he realized that his *Hobbit* sequel was heading in a darker direction.²⁰² The Ringwraiths began as nine human kings who received rings of power from Sauron, and gradually fell under the spell of the One Ring.²⁰³ These are not just frightening figures; they are an indication--along with Gollum, who is more pathetic than scary--that evil in this story is not confined to inherently evil species; that humans and hobbits can *become* monstrous, through processes that readers, even young ones, would recognize operating in their own world and lives.

One of the charges laid against the Lord of the Rings trilogy is that it is anti-modern. Certainly, Tolkien and his colleague, friend, and fellow fantasist C.S. Lewis tapped into the British medievalist tradition, as expressed by Victorian writers such as fantasy pioneer William Morris. Meredith Veldman notes, "Tolkien and Lewis agreed with and were influenced by Morris's conclusion that good art demands a good society, and both believed that the twentieth century possessed neither and the medieval period produced both."²⁰⁴ She says that according to the two writers, "What fantasy offered twentieth-century readers was not only relief from the sheer ugliness of so much of modern life but also a means of combating the ugliness."²⁰⁵

Veldman argues that the Lord of the Rings trilogy is an expression of something she calls the romantic world view:

²⁰² Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), 186.

²⁰³ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 44.

²⁰⁴ Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 48.

At the heart of the romantic world view is the belief that the empirical and analytical methods of modern science cannot comprehend all of reality, that truth in its wholeness extends beyond the reach of the physical senses. Associated with this sense of 'otherness' is a tendency toward transcendence: transcending *time*, first of all, in the sense that each human being owes a responsibility and allegiance to both the past and the future. This transcendent tendency extends also to the question of *identity*, in the sense that the human being is called to an awareness and an appreciation of the nonhuman realms, what we commonly call the natural world, and even, at times, the supernatural.²⁰⁶

Tolkien's adoption and promotion of this stance was a reaction to what he saw as the evils of modernity.

Middle-earth arose chiefly out Tolkien's love of languages, his invention of them, and his subsequent need to create people to speak them. But the *story* of Middle-earth was meant to be a mythology for England. Veldman notes:

He found the Arthurian legends too British; his country was England, and England needed an English myth. [...] By England Tolkien meant primarily the rural Midlands of the Edwardian era. He translated the setting of his boyhood into the world of the Shire, his imaginary land that he peopled with his three-foot-high hobbit heroes. [...] Except for their diminutive size and furry feet, the hobbits are

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 2-3.

stereotypical Englishmen: provincial and parochial, often petty, but with surprising reserves of strength.²⁰⁷

In the idyllic Shire, hobbits enjoy pipeweed, hoards of sentimental treasures, and many meals a day. The chief industry is farming, and the most advanced technology is Sandyman's mill.

But the Shire is one of many kinds of good in Tolkien's trilogy. Humans, Dwarves, Ents, and Elves create and embrace different kinds of beauty and wisdom, all of which, according to Meredith Veldman, are linked:

[T]he good and the heroic treasure the past and traditional wisdom, see themselves as part of the natural world, affirm the power of individual agency to transform the course of history, and seek to create a community in which each individual has a place and a purpose. In contrast, Tolkien's villains reject the lessons of the past, regard nature as a resource to be exploited, revel in technology, and work to obliterate individuality while creating a universe characterized by self-interest and alienation.²⁰⁸

While there are different kinds of good, evil appears to be monolithic. As Veldman says, "The Mordor spirit reduces individuals to an undifferentiated mass in need of regimentation."²⁰⁹ In terms of moral evil, this most closely echoes the characterization by

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 79.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 80.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 83.

Hartouni, who argues that industrialization itself conceives of humanity in ways that make great harm possible. However, where Hartouni's depiction avoids attaching this harm to the malevolent will of any single person, Tolkien links it to an enemy who can be resisted and defeated.

Tolkien was a student and appreciator of many languages and many mythologies, as represented in the various nations of Europe, but industry and war reduced large swathes of European land to poisoned wastelands very much akin to Tolkien's descriptions of Mordor: the black of mud, soot, and grease shot through with fire, amidst the clanking of machinery and cries of men and women whose lives were, one way or another, consumed. One of Mordor's names is "the Black Country."²¹⁰ The Black Country, incidentally, is the name of a region of the English Midlands just west of Birmingham, so named because the industrial production that dominated the area coated the land in soot. For generations, families worked nearly all of their waking hours at industrial jobs for poverty wages. Only the labour movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century brought better wages, time off, and schooling for children.

Tolkien grew up nearby, in the rural village of Sarehole, and he would have seen a sharp distinction between his community and those immediately to the west. War, for Tolkien, very likely seemed like the fulfillment of the promises made by the Black Country, with its gargantuan machines and capacity to poison the landscape. In the words of Veldman, "The lifeless, mechanical, tyrannical Mordor became for Tolkien a powerful symbol of what was wrong in twentieth-century England. Rooted in a worldview that reduces people to objects, Mordor glorifies technology and the power it confers as the

²¹⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (London: HarperCollins and Clio Press, 1990), 296.

unquestionable, ultimate good.”²¹¹ The Ring itself works as technology: the mighty think it can be used to augment their power to do good, but it enslaves them to another.

Tolkien left the Birmingham area and resettled in Oxford, which was, Veldman says, a “male dominated, hierarchical, and communal world[...] in which the Good Life could be effortlessly lived, with little concern about such things as economic production and distribution.”²¹² When the First World War broke out, it must have seemed as though Mordor had followed him.

Tolkien’s study of European mythology put him in contact with heroic battle stories, and his books are filled with just and magnificent battles, leading some of his critics, such as Michael Moorcock, to accuse him of glorifying war. But Tolkien fought in World War I and lived through World War II, and while these wars shaped his work, he was openly critical of them. Veldman says, “Born during his school days, Tolkien’s imaginary world blossomed with the nourishment of war. In the trenches of the Great War Tolkien discovered that his created languages and lore were more than a game”²¹³; they served as a coping strategy.

In response to assertions that the Lord of the Rings trilogy is derived from, or reducible to, the Second World War, Tolkien says, in the foreword to the trilogy:

The crucial chapter, ‘The Shadow of the Past’, is one of the oldest parts of the tale. It was written long before the foreshadow of 1939 had yet become a threat of inevitable disaster, and from that point the story would have developed along

²¹¹ Veldman 187.

²¹² Ibid. 45.

²¹³ Ibid. 77.

essentially the same lines, if that disaster had been averted. Its sources are things long before in mind, or in some cases already written, and little or nothing in it was modified by the war that began in 1939 or its sequels.

The real war does not resemble the legendary war in its process or its conclusion. If it had inspired or directed the development of the legend, then certainly the Ring would have been seized and used against Sauron; he would not have been annihilated but enslaved, and Barad-dûr would not have been destroyed but occupied. Saruman, failing to get possession of the Ring, would in the confusion and treacheries of the time have found in Mordor the missing links in his own researches into Ring-lore, and before long he would have made a Great Ring of his own with which to challenge the self-styled Ruler of Middle-earth. In that conflict both sides would have held hobbits in hatred and contempt: they would not long have survived even as slaves.²¹⁴

Wood asserts, "Tolkien is no pacifist. [...] No pagan delight in killing one's own kind is present anywhere in Tolkien's work. [...] Yet there is no forgiveness for the minions of Sauron. The orcs and Uruk-hai are wholly evil, and to slay them is to experience the joy of justice."²¹⁵ But Tolkien's own words, while not strictly those of a pacifist, sound like the words of a man who is deeply weary of war, and as cynical about the reality of battle as he is enamoured of legendary battles. John Garth, in *Tolkien and the Great War*, writes:

²¹⁴ Tolkien, Foreword to *The Fellowship of the Ring* N. pag..

²¹⁵ Wood 94.

He explained his approach much later in a letter to his son Christopher. 'I think the orcs as real a creation as anything in "realistic" fiction,' he wrote 'only in real life they are on both sides, of course. For "romance" has grown out of "allegory", and its wars are still derived from the "inner war" of allegory in which good is on one side and various modes of badness on the other. In real (exterior) life men are on both sides: which means a motley alliance of orcs, beasts, demons, plain naturally honest men, and angels.' So it might be said that the Goblins embody 'all the evil of our own side' in the real war, as well as all the evil on the German side. They wreck and pillage, and they kill prisoners. The Gnomes of Gondolin, meanwhile, embody virtues on which no nation had a monopoly. They represent (as he wrote of his Elves in general) 'beauty and grace of life and artefact'.²¹⁶

He says that while Tolkien's "statements on the influence or otherwise of the First World War on *The Lord of the Rings* are few and wary"²¹⁷, C.S. Lewis' review of the trilogy finds the war in "the endless, unintelligible movement, the sinister quiet of the front [...], the flying civilians, the lively, vivid friendships, the background of something like despair and the merry foreground, and such heaven-sent windfalls as a *cache* of tobacco salvaged from a ruin."²¹⁸ Garth says:

²¹⁶ John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: the Threshold of Middle-Earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 219. The letters quoted are in Tolkien's *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 82, 85.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 310.

²¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, "The Dethronement of Power," *Time & Tide* 36, qtd. in Garth 311.

More might be added to Lewis' list: the atmosphere of pre-war tension and watchfulness, Frodo Baggins's restless impatience with his parochial countrymen in the Shire, the world's dizzying plunge into peril and mass mobilizations; tenacious courage revealed in the ordinary people of town and farm, with camaraderie and love as their chief motivations; the striking absence of women from much of the action; the machine-dominated mind of Saruman. Tom Shippey notes that the failure of the Shire to fête Frodo Baggins on his return reflects in Tolkien 'the disillusionment of the returned veteran'.²¹⁹

Garth further points out that while World War I keenly influenced Tolkien's depiction of Middle-Earth, the world's development appears to have been as a sort of resistance: the constant travelling engendered a longing for home that in the novels becomes a strong sense of place²²⁰; the poor organization of the camps turned into a loathing of bureaucracy²²¹ that expresses itself in the Scouring of the Shire; "Faërie allowed the soldier to recover a sense of beauty and wonder, escape mentally from the ills confining him, and find consolation for the losses afflicting him--even for the loss of a paradise he has never known except in the imagination."²²²

Tolkien, in reacting to aspects of modernity that he found alarming, gathered them around a narrative of evil that was also infused with a Catholic's conception of Satan. His background in myth helped to lend weight and texture to his trilogy, and the heroic struggle therein. With all of these he created a new idea of evil that was strong enough to

²¹⁹ Garth 156.

²²⁰ Ibid. 110.

²²¹ Ibid. 94.

²²² Ibid. 78.

resonate with readers and spawn a host of imitators. It is useful, now, to go through the characteristics of the evil represented by Sauron and Mordor:

Evil is Tempting

There is nothing appealing or alluring about Sauron or Mordor, but Sauron's entry into the world of the Shire is the Ring, which makes the wearer invisible to everyone--other than Sauron and the Ringwraiths. Beyond being pretty and useful, the ring exerts some kind of influence over the bearer. Gollum, the singular and loathsome creature from *The Hobbit*, is revealed to be a hobbit himself, who committed murder to get the ring, and was transformed and twisted by his long exposure to it.²²³ Bilbo Baggins, who used the ring to good effect in the same book, finds himself curiously reluctant to give it up, a reluctance that changes to belligerence and anger when Gandalf insists. Tom Shippey points out that the ring acts on people very much like an addiction.²²⁴

Both Gandalf and Galadriel, powerful figures, exercise restraint only through refusing to touch the ring. Gandalf recoils from it, saying:

With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly. [...] Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me!

²²³ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 45-47.

²²⁴ Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 139.

I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. I shall have such need of it. Great perils lie before me.²²⁵

When Frodo offers Galadriel the Ring, she briefly entertains the notion, as a test of her own strength:

‘I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. For many long years I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands, and behold! it was brought within my grasp. The evil that was devised long ago works on in many ways, whether Sauron himself stands or falls. Would not that have been a noble deed to set to the credit of his Ring, if I had taken it by force or fear from my guest?

‘And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!’

She lifted up her hand and from the ring that she wore there issued a great light that illumined her alone and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful. Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded, and suddenly she laughed

²²⁵ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 57.

again, and lo! she was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice was soft and sad.

‘I pass the test,’ she said. ‘I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel.’²²⁶

Boromir, the human, does not fare so well, attacking Frodo in hopes of obtaining the Ring to use against Sauron, telling Frodo, “It is a gift, I say; a gift to the foes of Mordor. It is mad not to use it, to use the power of the Enemy against him. The fearless, the ruthless, these alone will achieve victory.”²²⁷ But Boromir’s fearlessness and ruthlessness end up breaking the Fellowship, driving Frodo away, and killing Boromir himself.²²⁸

Even steadfast Frodo, who knows what the Ring is, finds himself unable to fling it into the hottest part of the fire at first²²⁹; and he fails in the end, as well, and decides to keep it. It is only the intervention of Gollum that ensures that his mission is carried out.²³⁰

Gandalf, Galadriel, and Boromir are able to muster good arguments for why they should have access to the Ring’s power, but the power that the Ring exerts over people is more than persuasive; it is uncanny, and Gandalf and Galadriel, at least, know this. The temptation associated with the Ring is not merely the temptation of power, but a component of the evil itself.

²²⁶ Ibid. 458.

²²⁷ Ibid. 501.

²²⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (London: HarperCollins and Clio Press, 1990), 5.

²²⁹ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 56.

²³⁰ Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 267-268.

Evil Pollutes

Both Robert Ellwood and Paul Ricoeur link concepts of mythical evil to the idea of pollution. But Tolkien also lived in a country devastated by literal pollution. His depictions of Mordor evoke--in addition to the churned ruin of a battlefield--the bleakness of a landscape damaged by industry:

All was ominously quiet. The light was no more than that of dusk at a dark day's end. The vast vapours that arose in Mordor and went streaming westward passed low overhead, a great welter of cloud and smoke now lit again beneath a sullen glow of red.²³¹

The water was cool but not icy, and it had an unpleasant taste, at once bitter and oily, or so they would have said at home.²³²

Mordor was a dying land, but it was not yet dead. And here things still grew, harsh, twisted, bitter, struggling for life. In the glens of the Morgai on the other side of the valley low scrubby trees lurked and clung, coarse grey grass-tussocks fought with the stones, and withered mosses crawled on them; and everywhere great writhing, tangled brambles sprawled. Some had long stabbing thorns, some hooked barbs that rent like knives. The sullen shriveled leaves of a past year hung on them, grating and rattling in the sad airs, but their maggot-ridden buds were only just

²³¹ Ibid. 202.

²³² Ibid. 233.

opening. Flies, dun or grey, or black, marked like orcs with a red eye-shaped blotch, buzzed and stung; and above the briar-thickets clouds of hungry midges danced and reeled.²³³

[...][D]own on the stones behind the fences of the Black Land the air seemed almost dead, chill and yet stifling. Sam looked up out of the hollow. The land all about was dreary, flat and drab-hued. [...] South-eastward, far off like a dark standing shadow, loomed the Mountain. Smokes were pouring from it, and while those that rose into the upper air trailed away eastward, great rolling clouds floated down its sides and spread over the land.²³⁴

It remained dark, not only because of the smokes of the Mountain: there seemed to be a storm coming up, and away to the south-east there was a shimmer of lightnings under the black skies. Worst of all, the air was full of fumes; breathing was painful and difficult, and a dizziness came on them, so that they staggered and often fell.²³⁵

Evil, then, acts ecologically in Tolkien's books, corrupting and devastating the natural world as well as the souls of the Free Peoples of Middle Earth. For Tolkien, who revered nature, its destruction is wrong in and of itself, but he taps into a preexisting tradition of what Ellwood calls "the abomination of desolation."²³⁶

²³³ Ibid. 234.

²³⁴ Ibid. 250-251.

²³⁵ Ibid. 259.

²³⁶ Robert Ellwood, *Tales of Darkness, The Mythology of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2009), 19.

Evil is Palpable

Another feature of evil in Tolkien's work is that it is easily, instinctively detectable, and produces strong feelings of revulsion--even, sometimes, as it tempts. Before he has left the Shire, Frodo twice encounters Sauron's Black Riders, and twice fights the compulsion to put on the Ring.²³⁷ Later, Frodo's first intimation that the Ringwraiths are approaching is "a cold dread creeping over his heart".²³⁸ It is not just the Ringbearer who is affected, however; outside of Bree, Aragorn tells the hobbits, "Senses, too, there are other than sight or smell. We can feel their presence--it troubled our hearts, as soon as we came here, and before we saw them; they feel ours more keenly."²³⁹ And Gandalf, when he seeks advice from Saruman, is on his guard because, he says, when the door closes behind him, "suddenly I was afraid, though I knew no reason for it"²⁴⁰ and "in [Saruman's] eyes there seemed to be a white light, as if a cold laughter was in his heart."²⁴¹

The representation of evil as something palpable removes the possibility that one can serve it by being deceived or mistaken; if evil can be felt, then serving it is a deliberate choice. And who would choose to serve the palpably evil except for those who are evil themselves?

²³⁷ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 75, 80.

²³⁸ Ibid. 234.

²³⁹ Ibid. 228.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. 317.

²⁴¹ Ibid. 318.

Evil is Viciously Competitive

For all that evil in Tolkien's work reduces people and landscapes to dreary homogeneity, it does not interact well with others. Richard Purtill points out:

In Tolkien's stories [...], one prominent characteristic of the evil characters is their inability to trust each other or cooperate with each other effectively. [...] Saruman's rivalry with Sauron weakens both sides in the uneasy alliance, providing another advantage for the Fellowship of the Ring. And as we have mentioned already, Sauron's inability to picture his adversaries as anything but rivals for his power is a key element in his final defeat.

[...]

In fact, [...] there is a fatal contradiction on the side of evil. No one in his right mind would want to be one of Sauron's slaves. But one might, in certain moods, want to be Sauron or failing this, one of his satraps. Yet only the highest throne is really secure; there is only one position really worth having, even at the most cynical estimate. Thus all but one on the side of darkness are doomed to frustration.²⁴²

In Mordor, Sam and an unconscious Frodo are held captive by orcs, but Sam is able to take advantage of their infighting.²⁴³ Shortly after, the Ring influences Frodo to orcish behaviour: when he wakes, he thinks he has lost the Ring, and must abandon the quest as a

²⁴² Purtill 112-114.

²⁴³ Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 212-215.

failure; but Sam has it, and Frodo's relief quickly changes to avarice and hostility²⁴⁴, making him see in Sam's place "a foul little creature with greedy eyes and slobbering mouth."²⁴⁵ A moment later, he returns to himself, and is stricken with remorse. And in the end, it is not Frodo's good, but the vicious competitiveness of evil, that is evil's undoing, as the ring is lost in the struggle with Gollum.

The Ring's tendency to turn its bearers into grasping paranoiacs, and villainous characters' inability to cooperate, are indications--as is the decision to embrace an obvious, palpable evil--that Tolkien's conception of evil is founded on the notion of complete depravity. One cannot serve Sauron and be a good leader, or a steadfast friend, or an animal lover, or a dedicated parent.

Evil is Dehumanizing

It seems strange to talk about evil being dehumanizing in a trilogy where humans are in the minority, but English lacks a better word. In addition to the ecological pollution that Sauron's evil creates, he corrupts people, making them ignore the personhood of others, and gradually eroding their own personhood. Gollum and the Ringwraiths are examples of people who were formerly counted among the Free Peoples of Middle-earth, and are no longer. Being one of the Free Peoples is a matter of species, rather than politics or morality, but they are no longer recognizable as members of that species.

Even those who have not been exposed to evil for long enough to undergo physical change have their fellow sentient beings diminished in their sight. I have mentioned that

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 220.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. 221.

Frodo, for a moment, sees Sam as something less than a hobbit under the influence of the Ring. Saruman speaks to Gandalf in ways that show he is ready to regard any harm done to the Free Peoples as collateral damage in a great imaginary battle for advancement:

As the Power grows, its proved friends will also grow; and the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it. We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish, hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends.²⁴⁶

There are also the orcs, and Tolkien's treatment of orcs is troubling, because whatever Sauron has done to them, the depiction of them as wholly evil, undeserving of the same consideration as the Free Peoples, is reinforced with linguistic and lexical choices that are not the work of Sauron, but of the author himself. Elves get a capital letter for their species; orcs do not. When Sam Gamgee meets one, the orc is "it"²⁴⁷ instead of "he" or "she." Sauron created them in mockery of the Elves and uses them as soldiers and labourers--jobs that are valuable but have a high potential for abuse and exploitation by the powerful, but also carry with them class connotations.²⁴⁸ The orcs, lifelong subjects of

²⁴⁶ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 319.

²⁴⁷ Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 210.

²⁴⁸ Tolkien was also ambivalent about dwarves, who he envisions as created by one of the Ainur rather than Ilúvatar himself, but who were kept and made one of the Free Peoples because the Ainur did it to honour Ilúvatar rather than mock him. Dwarves, in the book, are miners and craftspeople, professions associated with the working classes. Unfortunately, this ambivalence is carried forward in other fantasy.

Sauron made only to do his bidding, should be figures of pity, but there is no compassion, redemption, or liberation for them.

Evil is Disembodied

Although those who act in the service of Sauron are physical beings, and the other Maiar--Saruman, Radagast, and Gandalf--have bodies that appear to be entirely human, Sauron himself is not depicted with a body, but rather as a single malevolent eye, simultaneously confined to Mount Doom and able to range over the whole of Middle-earth, spreading like an infection.

One effect of this aspect of Tolkien's innovation in evil is that it cannot be easily attached to any one recognizable group on Earth. It is true that the Lord of the Rings trilogy uses "black" and "evil" synonymously, and speaks of the dark men to the south, who are in league with Sauron to the east. This has long been taken as an expression of racism, and not without reason. However, Patrick Curry argues that Tolkien was "drawing on centuries of such moral valuation, not unrelated to historical experience attached to his chosen setting in order to convey something immediately recognizable in the context of his story,"²⁴⁹ and "[p]erhaps the worst you could say is that Tolkien doesn't actually go out of his way to forestall the possibility of a racist interpretation."²⁵⁰ The cooperation of diverse Free Peoples of Middle-earth mitigate against that, Curry asserts²⁵¹; and he cites Virginia Luling's work, which argues that "Tolkien in his non-fictional work repudiated racist ideas"

²⁴⁹ Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 42.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. 42.

²⁵¹ Ibid. 44.

and “in his sub-creation the whole intellectual underpinning of racism is absent.”²⁵²

Tolkien’s portrayal of different races banding together against a common foe is admittedly progressive for its time, albeit perhaps not as surprising as it would have been before the wars. After all, had nations who had been sworn foes for centuries not come together to defeat Germany and its allies? Luling also points out:

His work is, as Tom Shippey rightly, says, [sic], ‘ethnic’. He wanted to celebrate his native country, not as the birthplace of science, commerce, and the industrial revolution, but as the final home of enchantment. He stands, so to speak, for a Europe that has not been ‘Europeanised’.

His England, the country that he loved and for whose origins his imagination groped among the clues of legend and language, was not the England that became a commercial Empire, not a conquering but a conquered nation--conquered by ‘1066 and all that’.²⁵³

In other words, the Lord of the Rings trilogy subverts the insidious idea that an English background is somehow normal or neutral--even if this was considerably undermined when circumstances made a deliberately ethnic English text the blueprint for an entire genre of literature.

But whether Curry’s and Luling’s defenses are compelling or not, the disembodied model of evil in the books makes *possible* an idea of evil that is more powerful than a single

²⁵² Virginia Luling, “An Anthropologist in Middle-Earth,” *Proceedings of the J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference 1992*, eds. Patricia Reynolds and Glen GoodKnight (Milton Keynes: The Tolkien Society and The Mythopoeic Press, 1992), 56.

²⁵³ Ibid. 53.

person acting alone, but does not rely on Orientalism, racism, or classism. Orcs notwithstanding, evil in the Lord of the Rings books became *less* a function of race, and more of the values of those in power.

However, by reinvigorating it as a metaphysical category of being, and divorcing it from the purely human, Tolkien makes evil much stronger. While individual characters who have fallen under the spell of Sauron may redeem themselves--Boromir dies heroically; Gollum dies destroying the Ring--evil itself, in Tolkien's books, is absolute and unmitigated, utterly destructive, and instinctively repulsive. In other words, for all that it can be linked to actual events and actual circumstances, evil in these books is profoundly *other*. On the one hand, this is a comforting prospect, because it means that *we*, as ourselves, cannot be evil; if we were to succumb to temptation and become evil, then it would change us both mentally and physically, in clearly recognizable ways. Likewise, the people we know and love cannot be evil, and if they became so, we would know immediately. On the other hand, it packages the concept of evil with some deeply problematic assumptions.

Tolkien's depiction of absolute evil arose from a particular historical context. He had seen power that could blight landscapes in the course of its day-to-day operations, and be turned to kill great numbers of people, and he had seen it supported by and in his own community. Not only would his work resonate mythically; it would also draw immediate links between evil and real circumstances in the reader's world. A reader could look at his or her own situation, and perhaps feel the pall of Mordor. Moreover, absolute evil provided a solution to the structural challenges of fantasy fiction. The looming threat of Sauron helps the author to build tension into his narrative--paradoxically, to stretch the framework of

his story much wider, so that there is room to fill in detail. The result connected powerfully with audiences.

Chapter 3: The Story of Fantasy II: High Fantasy After Tolkien

The final book in the Lord of the Rings trilogy was published in 1955, with its first reprinting in 1966. Meredith Veldman reports:

The work sold steadily after 1956 and was never out of print. By the mid-1960s, sales of *The Lord of the Rings* were booming, and Tolkien was clearly acquiring a fanatical cult following. [...] [In 1965], Ace Books in New York had printed an unauthorized paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings* in the United States. The edition sold briskly, especially on American college campuses. The publicity surrounding Tolkien's battle with Ace Books and the publication of the authorized Ballantine paperback edition later that year sent sales soaring. In 1966, world sales of *The Lord of the Rings* hit 2,750,000, and two years later, sales reached the three million mark. By 1972, the paperback edition was selling approximately 100,000 copies per year in Britain. [...] By 1980, eight million copies of *The Lord of the Rings*, in eighteen languages, had been sold.²⁵⁴

Tolkien's work changed the fantasy genre. This chapter will trace, in broad strokes, the development of high fantasy after Tolkien. It will briefly treat a selection of key works, and examine how evil manifests in each of them, showing that while there are many exceptions, Tolkien's work set the tone for depictions of evil.

²⁵⁴ Veldman 98.

Negotiating British Identity

In *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie writes both, “Wherever the English settle, they never leave England,”²⁵⁵ and, “The trouble with the English is that their history happened overseas, so they don’t know what it means.”²⁵⁶ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Britain’s identity revolved around its status as a colonial power, and its stories about itself, whether celebratory or critical, reflected that. The twentieth century saw the dissolution of the British Empire, and with it, a search for new identity. Fantasy, particularly fantasy invoking a heroic British past or the trappings thereof, became one way of resituating England and Britain in the popular imagination. Inspired by Tolkien--or, perhaps, inspired by the things he was inspired by--other British authors began to mine the myths of the British Isles, to find and define Britain's proper place in a postwar world.

One of Tolkien’s contemporaries was T.H. White.²⁵⁷ White’s tetralogy, collected in the single volume *The Once and Future King* (1958, with components published from 1938 onwards), engages with Arthurian mythology, retelling it in a way that echoes contemporary concerns about the rise of Hitler and the advent of war. Merlin, who has lived backwards, makes specific mention of Hitler to young Arthur.²⁵⁸ And at the end of the last book, written in the darkest days of WW2, Arthur, now an old man on the eve of his last battle with Mordred, reflects on the various ways in which human beings have tried to

²⁵⁵ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: The Penguin Group, 1988), 133.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. 300

²⁵⁷ It is interesting that White, like Tolkien, was born in an English colony in the Global South--White in India, Tolkien in South Africa. Lewis and *Dracula* author Bram Stoker in Ireland, Arthur Machen in Wales, Robert Louis Stevenson in Scotland. Perhaps the idea of owing one’s true allegiance to distant lands was a factor in the development of modern fantasy.

²⁵⁸ T.H. White, *The Once and Future King* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd., 1958), 263.

avoid war, and despairs, thinking, "Man had gone on, through age after age, avenging wrong with wrong, slaughter with slaughter,"²⁵⁹ and of himself and Mordred, "we are nothing but figureheads to complex forces which seem to be under a kind of impulse. It is as if there was an impulse in the fabric of society."²⁶⁰ The previous books have spent time exploring the various reasons why human beings harm each other, including revenge, loyalty, thwarted entitlement, and anger at injustice, and Arthur has tried to harness human aggression towards good ends, only to see Camelot crumble. Evil here does not conform very closely to Tolkien's image of it: it tempts only under the guise of doing what is right and just and necessary, and when it dehumanizes, it dehumanizes only the enemy. This portrait of evil is most closely aligned with Cole's: it is fully human. Arthur himself is unable to settle the question of why human beings go to war. In the midst of this, however, he meets a boy, Sir Thomas Malory, and charges him with passing on the story, which eases Arthur's mind. Even in the face of all-consuming war, White indicates, there is redemptive value in storytelling, and the hope that stories will help human beings to learn from what has gone before.

C.S. Lewis was one of Tolkien's colleagues at Oxford, and as members of the writers' group called the Inklings, they expounded upon their theories of literature, fantasy, writing, and religion. Although Lewis and Tolkien were not always in agreement, and in fact Tolkien died unreconciled with his former friend, the *Chronicles of Narnia*, published from 1950 to 1956, owe a great deal to Tolkien. The series is an allegorical retelling of the Christian Bible, wherein children from Earth--"Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve"--journey to a magical land to acquaint themselves with, and do the bidding of, Aslan, the lion

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 629.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 631.

who represents Christianity's triune God. The Narnia books, which are set at various points through Narnia's timeline, have the children solving problems, deposing tyrants and witches, and exploring the magical world while learning Christian virtues.

Lewis' books being contemporaneous with Tolkien's, and influenced heavily by Christianity--Protestant Christianity, where Tolkien was Catholic--his idea of evil comes from the same roots as his colleague's, but does not resemble Sauron. A great deal of antagonism is presented, or at least engendered, by ordinary Narnians: protagonists in *Prince Caspian*, *The Horse and His Boy*, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and *The Last Battle* fight tyrannical leaders, fully human in all but the last of the books. In both *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, antagonism comes from one of the child voyagers--Edmund Pevensey in the first, and the initially odious cousin Eustace in the second, although both are redeemed by their contact with Aslan. Essential evil does exist, however, and seems to be in part a matter of species. But the most frequently recurring villain, present in three of the seven books, is the White Witch, Jadis. Of uncertain origin²⁶¹, Jadis tends to prey on young boys, using Digory in *The Magician's Nephew*, Edmund Pevensey in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and Prince Rilian in *The Silver Chair*. They do her bidding until Aslan or those who serve him, offer an alternative.

Jadis has the power to tempt and corrupt the boys; she sows and thrives on discord; and while she cannot quite despoil the land, she makes it "[a]lways winter and never

²⁶¹ In *The Magician's Nephew*, she is the last of a proud and terrible race from a dying world called Charn--dying because she during a war she unleashed a spell that "would destroy all living things except the one who spoke it." (Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* [New York et. al.: Scholastic, 1955], 66.) She has been awakened by Digory Kirke, one of the humans, out of curiosity (Ibid. 54), and slips into Narnia. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* though, according to the Beaver family, she comes from "your father Adam's first wife, her they called Lilith. And she was one of the Jinn. That's what she comes from on one side. And on the other side she comes of the giants." (C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* [New York: HarperCollins, 1950-1978], 88.)

Christmas[.]”²⁶² She does not seem to dehumanize those in thrall to her, although the humans they are in her company are distinctly unpleasant, and she treats them like servants or slaves. But she presents as beautiful and impressive rather than repulsive, even to the most virtuous characters, and she is not disembodied. In fact, Karin Fry suggests that her beauty and embodiment might be part of the problem, noting, “Ultimate evil in Narnia is always a woman with supernatural power over men.”²⁶³ She adds, “The world that Lewis creates finds femininity suspicious, deceptive, and closer to evil because it seduces and beguiles men, and indeed, has some power over them.”²⁶⁴ In keeping with Lewis’ religious beliefs, though, evil only ever exists in Narnia at Aslan’s sufferance. It is always less powerful, and vanquished by humans doing what Aslan tells them to do.

Much has been made of the colonial assumptions inherent in the idea that humans who come from afar are most fit to rule Narnia, are in fact divinely ordained to do so. Rulers not sanctioned by Aslan, even those who arise domestically, exploit the Narnian people cruelly. A staunch monarchist²⁶⁵ who came from a Protestant family in Northern Ireland, Lewis had no patience for modern English sensibilities. Edmund becomes the stuff traitors are made of at “that horrid school that was where he had begun to go wrong.”²⁶⁶ Of the parents of the insufferable bully Eustace, Lewis says, “They were very up-to-date and advanced people. They were vegetarians, non-smokers and teetotalers and wore a special kind of underclothes. In their house there was very little furniture and very few clothes on

²⁶² Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. 20.

²⁶³ Karin Fry, “No Longer a Friend of Narnia: Gender in Narnia,” *The Lion, the Witch, and the Worldview: The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy*, eds. Gregory Bassham and Jerry L. Walls (Chicago and LaSalle IL: Open Court, 2005), 162.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. 164.

²⁶⁵ Charles Butler, *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children’s Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, and Susan Cooper* (Lanham MD, Toronto, Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), 19

²⁶⁶ Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* 197.

the beds and the windows were always open."²⁶⁷ Their only child grows up cruel, cowardly, selfish, and lacking in imagination until he submits to Aslan. In Lewis' work, modernity reads as a pernicious influence, driving people away from the proper Christian perspective, which is also readable as the proper British perspective.

Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* books (1965-1977) combine Nesbit's and Lewis' trope of children away from home stumbling into the magical with Arthurian and Welsh myth. The Drew children are ushered into a secret society to fight the Dark, a nebulous elemental evil served by disagreeable people with no discernible motives for their malice, other than that they serve the Dark. A fellow child, Will Stanton, is the last of the Old Ones, and he and a number of adult acquaintances who are themselves Old Ones fight to bring down the Dark. The Drews are among the numerous helpers who never fully understand what is going on, and Will and the other Old Ones repeatedly lament that they are pawns in the battle, but the children themselves are always eager to help.

In a country devastated by war, its empire lost and its moral foundations shaken to the core, the idea of a pre-imperial glorious past secretly ordering the world must have been comforting--the idea that it could combat an unfocused Dark even more so. Moreover, an unfocused Dark is no longer linked to any single nationality or ethnic group, allowing the possibility of a multicultural England. Indeed, in *Silver on the Tree*, Will Stanton uses his powers to fight racist bullies. However, as much as for Cooper "Dark" and "Light" present a stirring battle, as the series progresses she makes it clear that they are not synonymous with evil and good. A character tells Will,

²⁶⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York et. al.: Scholastic, 1952), 1.

‘[T]hose men who know anything about the Light also know that there is a fierceness to its power, like the bare sword of the law, or the white burning of the sun. [...] Other things, like humanity, and mercy, and charity, that good men hold more precious than all else, they do not come first for the Light. Oh, sometimes they are there; often, indeed. But in the very long run the concern of you people is with the absolute good, ahead of all. You are like fanatics. [...] At the centre of the Light there is a cold white flame, just as at the centre of the Dark there is a great black pit bottomless as the heart of the universe.’²⁶⁸

As much as the victory of the Light is presented as being clearly advantageous to humans, what is good for the Light is not good for ordinary people. Thus, Cooper sets up a barrier between what is needed to defeat mythical evil and what is needed to address the harm that human beings do to each other.

Alan Garner’s work focuses on the disruptive potential of magic. In *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963), magic is presented to the eager young protagonists as an ancient and dangerous tool that they are better off leaving alone, and in both books the wizard Cadellin Silverbrow admonishes them for meddling and does everything to limit their involvement, which eventually proves dangerous and destructive. In *Elidor* (1965) and *The Owl Service* (1967), child characters’ lives are enriched by their experience of magic and of a world beyond or behind their own, but they are just as happy to leave it behind again. In all cases, myth and magic are best when they are safely in the past or other worlds.

²⁶⁸ I think *The Grey King* 145-146, New York: Atheneum 1977

Both Garner's and Cooper's books are what Farah Mendlesohn would characterize as intrusion fantasies, in which magic encroaches on the everyday world. There is a nostalgic element to these, however, and the intimation that although magic makes itself felt in the modern world rarely and with disruptive results, it is always, as Mendlesohn notes, seething below the surface.²⁶⁹ The work of both authors, however, argues that Britain's magic is best left in the past, and to try to recapture the old magic is fruitless at best and dangerous at worst. Cooper's series ends with the Light triumphing and withdrawing, telling humans,

We have delivered you from evil, but the evil that is inside men is at the last a matter for men to control. The responsibility and the hope and the promise are in your hands--your hands and the hands of the children of all the men on this earth. The future cannot blame the present, just as the present cannot blame the past.²⁷⁰

The Light relinquishes its hold over human destiny, albeit in a way that seems designed to absolve Britons of their colonial history.

Another British author who used fantasy to negotiate Britain's place in the postwar world is Michael Moorcock. Moorcock's first Elric novel, *The Stealer of Souls*, was published in 1963. Moorcock would later become the editor of *New Worlds*, a British magazine dedicated to literary science fiction, and he was interested in challenging the ideas of

²⁶⁹ Mendlesohn 116.

²⁷⁰ Cooper, *Silver on the Tree*, 272.

“orthodox Christian writers who substituted faith for artistic rigour[.]”²⁷¹ Although the Elric Saga fits more comfortably into the sword and sorcery subgenre (to be discussed below), it bears mentioning here because it is a direct response to what Moorcock saw as the conservative political stance of the Lord of the Rings trilogy. In the first book of the series, Elric, a young man with albinism, is the Emperor of the island of Melniboné, whose inhabitants are apparently not human:

These are the people of Melniboné, the Dragon Isle, which ruled the world for ten thousand years and has ceased to rule it for less than five hundred years. And they are cruel and clever and to them ‘morality’ means little more than a proper respect for the traditions of a hundred centuries.

To the young man, four hundred and twenty-eighth in direct line of descent from the first Sorcerer Emperor of Melniboné, their assumptions seem not only arrogant but foolish: it is plain that the Dragon Isle has lost most of her power and will soon be threatened, in another century or two, by a direct conflict with the emerging human nations whom they call, somewhat patronizingly, the Young Kingdoms.²⁷²

It is not very difficult to posit links with an England coming to terms with a post-imperial world, in which case the above passage becomes a scathing critique. But Elric stands apart from his people: unable to participate in many physical pursuits, he reads, and this “has

²⁷¹ Michael Moorcock, “Epic Pooh,” 1978, 21 December 2012
<<http://www.revolutionsf.com/article.php?id=953>>, 1.

²⁷² Michael Moorcock, *Elric of Melniboné* (New York: Ace Books, 1987), 4.

also taught him to question the uses to which power is put, to question his motives, to question whether his own power should be used at all, in any cause.”²⁷³ When Elric’s throne is taken by his able-bodied cousin Yyrkoon²⁷⁴, he fights to get it back, but discovers that he prefers the world outside of Melniboné. He believes that engaging with it will allow him to change Melniboné for the better²⁷⁵, so he departs again, allowing Yyrkoon to rule in his stead.

In this case, antagonism comes not from some threat outside of the world, to be heroically battled, but from Elric’s own home and family. When Elric meets barbarian pirates, he finds that his people are hated and feared. “You offer us harm by your very presence,”²⁷⁶ one tells him. “[Y]ou creatures are not human. Worse--you are not gods, though you behave as if you were. Your day is over and you must be wiped out, your city destroyed, your sorceries forgotten.”²⁷⁷

Arguably, the work of Tolkien, Lewis, Cooper, Garner, White, and Moorcock participates in a negotiation of British identity following World War II and the loss of the empire. Powerfully rooted in Britain’s mythic past, and yet also ambivalent to it, the authors deal with questions of what constitutes a good life, what is wrong, and what is the correct way forward. For Lewis and Tolkien, evil is aligned with the forces of modernity. For Garner, connecting with the amoral elemental forces of a magical past, such as in *The Owl Service* or *The Moon of Gomrath*, can create just as much harm and destruction as the actions of the malicious Morrigan in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *Elidor*, but these

²⁷³ Ibid. 5.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. 52.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. 175-176.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. 42.

²⁷⁷ Ibid. 42.

forces also link to an authenticity that he finds lacking in modernity. For White, the heroic past does not hold solutions; its value is in the cautionary tales it furnishes. Finally, for Moorcock, the past is not a site of glory but a source of shame, and part of a hero's journey involves learning to function rightly and justly in a world where one's own people are an enduring threat.

American Fantasy, and Sword and Sorcery

Although the terms "high fantasy" and "sword and sorcery" are often used interchangeably, Joseph A. McCullough argues that there is a distinction between sword and sorcery and what he calls heroic fantasy. For my own purposes, I will continue to use the term "high fantasy" to apply to quest fantasy and genre fantasy that takes place in a secondary world, because "heroic fantasy" is intended to cast a much wider net.

In his 1967 introduction to Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Conqueror*, L. Sprague de Camp, who prefers the term "heroic fantasy," locates its roots with Lord Dunsany, William Morris, and E.R. Eddison, defining it thus:

Heroic fantasy is a type of story of the supernatural, laid in an imaginary world--either this planet as it is once supposed to have been, or as it will be long hence, or some other world or dimension--where magic works and all men are mighty, all women beautiful, all problems simple, and all life adventurous.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ L. Sprague De Camp, "Introduction," *Conan the Conqueror* by Robert E. Howard (New York: Ace Books, 1953), 8.

This definition excludes a great deal of high fantasy, including the Lord of the Rings trilogy, with its unmighty hero and praises of unadventurous life, but McCullough argues that de Camp and his colleague Lin Carter used “heroic fantasy” as an inclusive term that would place sword-and-sorcery fiction alongside “the works of Homer, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, and the Icelandic Sagas”²⁷⁹, as well as the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Nonetheless, the Robert E. Howard biography *Dark Valley Destiny*, also written by de Camp, Catherine Cook de Camp, and Jane Whittington Griffin, credits Howard as being “the boy who grew up to create, almost single-handedly the subgenre of American fiction that is now called ‘Heroic Fantasy’”²⁸⁰. In an era when fantasy was struggling to establish itself as both a marketable genre and an academic field, in defiance of the sordid reputation of the pulps and the lofty condemnation of Edmund Wilson, perhaps de Camp can be forgiven for wanting it both ways.

“Sword and sorcery” was a term coined by Fritz Leiber in 1961, to describe his stories of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser and distinguish them from the kind of fantasy written by Tolkien²⁸¹, compared to which his was “an earthier sort of fantasy.”²⁸² It can also be fruitfully applied to works such as Clark Ashton Smith’s Zothique stories (1932-1953), Andre Norton’s Witch World series (1963-present), Michael Moorcock’s aforementioned Elric Saga (1963-present), and Robin W. Bailey’s Frost books (1983-1985). These works apparently lend themselves to appearing in series rather than singly or even in trilogies. This is no doubt due, in part, to the early circumstances of their production.

²⁷⁹ Joseph McCullough, “The Demarcation of Sword and Sorcery,” *Black Gate*, 13 December 2012 <<http://www.blackgate.com/the-demarcation-of-sword-and-sorcery/>>.

²⁸⁰ L. Sprague De Camp, Catherine Cook de Camp, and Jane Whittington Griffin, *Dark Valley Destiny: The Life of Robert E. Howard* (USA: Blue Jay Books, 1983), 1, qtd. in McCullough.

²⁸¹ McCullough.

²⁸² Fritz Leiber, *The Swords of Lankhmar* (London: Grafton Books, 1987), qtd. in McCullough.

Robert E. Howard's serial fantasies predate the Lord of the Rings trilogy, and derive inspiration from early fantasy works that are, as I showed in the last chapter, largely episodic; but Smith, Howard, Norton, and Leiber also spent a considerable portion of their careers writing for magazines, where episodic stories were far more marketable. The most representative novel-length examples that I have found tend to be shorter as well--most under three hundred pages.²⁸³ McCullough points out that the trilogies that dominate high fantasy and the shorter formats of sword and sorcery are encouraged by market forces as much as any artistic reason.²⁸⁴

McCullough argues that sword and sorcery differs from high fantasy in three major respects: first of all, the heroes of sword and sorcery are "men of action"²⁸⁵ who, secondly, operate outside of society, and, finally, act chiefly for themselves and their own interests. McCullough says, "Unbound by any societal sense of right and wrong (at least as most would recognize it), these men are free to chart their own destiny, and their motivations and actions are purely self-defined."²⁸⁶ He contrasts this with fantasy where "Instead the definitive aspect [of the scope is that] something exists that is bigger and stronger than the heroes. This can be God, gods, fate, destiny, good and evil, law and chaos. But these must be more than concepts. They must be tangible driving forces at work in the world."²⁸⁷ Admittedly, even sword and sorcery characters who act in the interest of the greater good, or at the behest of gods, do so largely in isolation, and out of necessity rather than a sense of duty.

²⁸³ Granted, I am uncertain whether this is a genuine feature of the genre or a quirk of my selection methods.

²⁸⁴ McCullough.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.. In a parenthetical statement, he adds, "Until recently there were few heroic women, but this is a trait of all heroic fantasy, and thus beyond the scope of this essay."

²⁸⁶ Ibid..

²⁸⁷ Ibid..

Unsurprisingly perhaps, vast, ecological, apocalyptic threats are less common in these books. If they appear, they can be brought down by the lone hero, with the aid of the few who cluster around him or her. Sorcerers are common, as are creatures created, reanimated, or summoned by sorcerers. For example, Bailey's Frost is charged with protecting the Book of the Last Battle from an insane wizard who wants to use it to end the world.²⁸⁸ Frost succeeds in defeating him with the help of a companion, who in sacrificing herself reveals herself to be a goddess. She imbues Frost with her power, so that she can use the book to summon the Lords of Light.²⁸⁹

Gods and demons are present in many of these stories, but they are not benign, omnipotent, humanity-loving creator gods like Ilúvatar; even Bailey's quasi-angelic Lords of Light confess to having an agenda that does not take into account what is good for humanity.²⁹⁰ The gods are many, their influence localized, and very often they are hostile to the interests of the hero. They are arguably a manifestation of the same fears and uncertainties that spawned Cthulhu: they are divine, tangible, capable of interacting with humans... and they are utterly indifferent, if not hostile.

Evil, in these stories, is largely the function of individuals who serve dark powers. Think of the anarchist, the crime lord, the enemy spy, all of whom were staple pulp villains. Later, the communist would supplant them in the American popular imagination.

For De Camp may not have been that far off course when he hailed Howard as the creator of a subgenre of *American* fiction. I would like to argue that the sword and sorcery genre is a far more Americentric phenomenon than high fantasy as a whole. In "The

²⁸⁸ Robin W. Bailey, *Frost* (New York: Timescape Books, 1983), 13.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. 188-195.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. 196.

Trouble With Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" (1995) William Cronon talks about the role of the Frontier Myth in the formation of America's idea of itself, making a point that speaks to the political character of high fantasy, particularly sword and sorcery:

Among the core elements of the frontier myth was the powerful sense among certain groups of Americans that wilderness was the last bastion of rugged individualism. [...] By fleeing to the outer margins of settled land and society--so the story ran--an individual could escape the confining strictures of civilized life.²⁹¹

The idea of a lone hero braving, and finding authenticity in, a hostile wilderness while defending the innocent and protecting civilization from threats invokes the idea of the frontiersman or the cowboy. Howard himself was a Texan, and among the many stories he contributed to the pulps were westerns; and it is very possible that his sword and sorcery stories, and the subgenre they spawned, are simply another way for America to tell its story of itself.²⁹²

The subgenre is not monolithic. Clark Ashton Smith's work, which predates Howard's, has a different protagonist for each story rather than a single hero, but maintains the Orientalist atmosphere:

²⁹¹ William Cronon, "The Trouble With Wilderness: Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 21 December 2012 <http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon_Trouble_with_Wilderness_1995.pdf>, 7.

²⁹² Another American founding myth is that of the covenanted nation, that conceives of America through the Puritan belief that they were founding the third and final covenanted nation, after Israel and England had proven faithless. The covenanted nation is divinely chosen, and destined to rise victorious despite persecution. Note that this narrative too depends on a virtuous protagonist surrounded by enemies.

Amid the far-stretching fruitful vineyards of Zhel, and into Istanam of the myriad cities; over the high passes of Ymorth, where snow tarried at the autumn's beginning; and across the salt-pale desert of Dhir, Xeethra followed that bright imperial dream which had now become his only memory. Always eastward he went, traveling sometimes with caravans whose members hoped that a madman's company would bring them good fortune; but oftener he went as a solitary wayfarer.²⁹³

Zothique is--as is standard for Orientalism of the time, both American and British--achingly beautiful but full of treachery, brimming with necromancers and wily demons.

Andre Norton was one of the few women who wrote for the pulps, her name enabling her to pass as a man. Her Witch World stories do not follow a single protagonist, although the protagonists tend to be isolated in some way. The problems they solve have less to do with vanquishing evil, and more with coping with or ending that isolation, and transcending the limits that have been placed on them. "Dream Smith," for example, is the story of a young smith who is disfigured when a strange metal explodes in the smithy. He resigns himself to living alone, using the metal to forge figures of small animals to amuse himself, until he befriends a disabled and beleaguered princess, and uses the metal figures to magically transport them to a dream world where they are healed and can be together for eternity. There is no evil here; only the unkindness that human beings inflict on each other.

²⁹³ Clark Ashton Smith, "Xeethra," *Zothique*, ed. Lin Carter (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), 12.

The demarcation between high fantasy and sword and sorcery is by no means clear. Books such as Mercedes Lackey's Valdemar novels, and David Eddings' Belgariad novels, to be discussed shortly, are high fantasies that make occasional use of sword and sorcery tropes.

The pulps declined as a format after the Second World War. Some magazines dedicated themselves to science fiction, and some of these, such as *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, accepted fantasy as well. However, the publication of novels increased. As I mentioned, the first reprinting of Tolkien's trilogy occurred in 1966, and it had already become enormously popular.

In America, Ballantine and other publishing houses capitalized on the success of the Lord of the Rings trilogy by reprinting adult fantasy by other authors from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The aforementioned Lin Carter and L. Sprague de Camp were two champions of the genre, and, according to McCullough, "are owed a great deal of credit for being the first to try to define, explain, and codify this new type of writing."²⁹⁴ They were not the first, and the writing was not exactly new--but they are creditable with establishing fantasy as a marketing category. At first they relied heavily upon reprints, but new fiction was being written, and in time came to dominate. The advent of Dungeons & Dragons, the role-playing game, in 1974, undoubtedly gave the genre a boost.

²⁹⁴ McCullough.

Formula fantasy

Fantasy, with its mythic trappings, was useful for negotiating and articulating national values, national identity, and in some cases national anxieties, but by the 1980s, it was also a robust marketing category. In the 1980s, with the efforts to establish fantasy as a recognized genre successful, books proliferated and a formula solidified.

Two exemplars of the formula are David Eddings' Belgariad (1982-1984) and Guy Gavriel Kay's Fionavar Tapestry (1984-1986). Both series hit many of the same notes as the Lord of the Rings trilogy--naïve parties being brought in to play pivotal roles, the return of a rightful king to the throne, starkly opposed powers named Dark and Light, evil entombed in a mountain, a loyal wizard and a treacherous one. The Fionavar Tapestry even involves dark elves and light elves, beloved of the divine, who sail west when the time is right. But the tone of Eddings' tetralogy is very different from Kay's trilogy, and the two differ immensely in their portrayals of human beings and their place in the cosmos, using elemental evil to strike radically different notes.

The Belgariad arguably represents the worst excesses of the high fantasy genre. Eddings is explicit about his contempt for the form, saying in the introduction to *The Rivan Codex*, "Genre fiction is writing that's done for money. [...] Great literary art is difficult to read because you have to think when you read it, and most people would rather not."²⁹⁵

Well into his teens, hero Garion is supposed to obey his superiors without understanding the reasons for their strange orders, prohibitions, and evasions. When he does mature into understanding, it is only to learn about the Prophecy--a different kind of

²⁹⁵ David Eddings, "Introduction," *The Rivan Codex* by David Eddings and Leigh Eddings (New York: Ballantine, 1998), 18.

arbitrary authority dictating his every move. The Prophecy and the evasiveness of his companions conspire to ensure that revelations about Garion's nature and his place in the world are made at suitably striking moments in the narrative.

Brian Attebery points out that genre fantasy must balance realistic depictions with mythic patterns.²⁹⁶ Eddings' prophecy is one way of striking this balance, compelling human beings to carry out actions and undertake journeys that their characters, as written, cannot otherwise be expected to take. The book titles have a chess motif--*Pawn of Prophecy*, *Queen of Sorcery*, *Magician's Gambit*, *Castle of Wizardry*, and *Enchanter's End Game*--suggesting that the characters are pieces to be moved around on a gameboard. This scheme skews the series' moral landscape: characters who have no choice cannot be held morally culpable for their actions, good or bad; and deeds that are otherwise appalling, done at the right moment to the right person, acquire the patina of the heroic.

Evil in these books is represented by the god Torak, once most beautiful of all the gods, who defied his siblings and tried to take the Orb created by one of his fellow gods, Aldur, and was scarred and disfigured by it. The Prophecy predicts that he will rise to reclaim the Orb, but it does not name a victor. Interestingly, in the introduction to the final book, Torak has a chance to explain his own version of events:

Now I was greatly loath to lift my hand against them. Yet I could not permit that they should despoil the lands of my people or loose the blood of those who worshipped me. And I knew that from such war between my brothers and me could

²⁹⁶ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 30.

come only evil. In that struggle, the Destinies I had seen might be sent against each other before it was time, and the universe be shaken apart in that meeting.

And so I chose that which I feared, but which was less evil than the danger I foresaw. I took up the accursed Cthrag Yaska and raised it against the earth itself. [...] But such was the malice which Aldur had wrought within the stone that it smote me with fire as I raised it to divide the world and prevent evil bloodshed. Even as I spoke the commands unto it, it burst into dreadful fire and smote me. The hand with which I held it was consumed and the eye with which I beheld it was blinded. One half of my face was marred by its burning. And I, who had been the fairest among my brothers, was now abhorrent to the eyes of all, and I must cover my face with a living mask of steel, lest they shun me.

An agony filled me from the evil that was done me, and pain lived within me, which could never be quenched until the foul stone could be freed of its evil and could repent of its malice.²⁹⁷

It is unclear whether Torak believes this in good faith²⁹⁸, but if so, it bears out Philip Cole's assertion that some of the greatest atrocities can be committed by those who believe that they are stamping out evil.

Torak, although created along different lines, shares many of the characteristics of evil outlined in Chapter 2. He is able to tempt one of the great wizards to betray his

²⁹⁷ David Eddings, *Enchanter's Endgame, The Belgariad Part Two* (Garden City NY: Nelson Doubleday Inc., 1984), 323-324.

²⁹⁸ I am given to understand that Eddings wrote another trilogy from the point of view of Torak's people, but a fuller treatment of Eddings' work lies beyond the scope of the current study.

fellows: Zedar, the Saruman to Belgarath's Gandalf, tells Polgara that his treachery began as an attempt to recapture the Orb for the forces of good:

I thought that by pretending allegiance to Torak, I might gain his confidence and steal it back from him. [...] His mind and will overwhelm me. He took me in his hand and he crushed out all of my resistance. The touch of his hand, Polgara! [...] It reaches down into the very depths of your soul. I know Torak for what he is-- loathsome, twisted evil beyond your understanding of the word--but when he calls me, I must go; and what he bids me do, I must do--even though my soul shrieks within me against it. Even now, as he sleeps, his fist is around my heart.²⁹⁹

Belgarath punishes Zedar by making him immortal and sealing him forever in rock.³⁰⁰ Zedar, just like Garion, has acted out his part in the Prophecy, and quite against his will, but he is punished for eternity because of it.

Torak also has a polluting effect on the landscape, plunging his home city, Cthol Mishrak, into eternal night:

As they rode beneath the cloud, it grew steadily darker. It was not precisely the clean darkness of night, but was rather a kind of dirty murkiness, a deep shade hovering in the air. They crested a rise and saw before them a cloud-enshrouded basin, and in its center, half-obsured by the pervasive gloom, stood the ravaged City of Night. The vegetation around them had shrunk to a few sparse weeds and an

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 575.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. 581.

unhealthy-looking, stunted grass, pale and sick for want of sun. The boulders thrusting up out of the earth were splotted with a sort of leprous lichen that ate into the rock itself, and nodules of a white fungus lumped in grotesque profusion, spreading out across the dank soil as if the ground itself were diseased. [...] The dank air grew colder, and the diseaselike lichen ate at the tumbled stones of the ruined houses. Mold seemed to cling to everything, and the pale fungus grew in grotesque lumps in corners and crannies. The smell of decay was everywhere, a damp, rotten stench, and slimy pools of stagnant water lay among the ruins.³⁰¹

Also troubling is the books' racial essentialism.³⁰² Torak has people who are sacred to him, the Angaraks, who bear an uncomfortable resemblance to Orientalist portrayals of Asian people from the "Yellow Peril" narratives of the first half of the twentieth century, and some present-day American conservative discourse concerning the Middle East, and other characters regard them as legitimate targets for genocide.³⁰³ A subset of the Angaraks, the Murgos, conduct trade, but it is only a front for a spy network and invading force, proving that they are treacherous and any contact with them is dangerous. Torak

³⁰¹ Ibid. 554-555.

³⁰² "Most of the similarities between the people of this world and our imaginary one should be fairly obvious. The Sendars correspond to rural Englishmen, the Arends to Norman French, the Tolnedrans to Romans, the Chereks to Vikings, the Algars to Cossacks, the Ulgos to Jews, and the Angaraks to Hunnish-Mongolian-Muslim-Visigoths out to convert the world by the sword. I didn't really have correspondences in mind for the Drasnians, Rivans, Marags, or Nyissans. They're story elements and don't need to derive from *this world*" (Eddings, *The Rivan Codex*, 13).

³⁰³ When King Anheg of Cherek says, "The war can't be avoided, and I for one am just as happy about that. Let's exterminate the Angaraks once and for all," King Korodullin of Arendia adds, "Must we live forever under the threat of invasion from the East? Might it not be best forever to quell them?" (Eddings, *Castle of Wizardry*, 309) One of the characters, Hettar, whose parents were killed by a subset of Angaraks called Murgos, kills them whenever he sees them. The rest of the group regards this murderous hatred of an entire ethnic group with, at worst, amused exasperation. Hettar's penchant for massacre is a weakness because it tends to hold up the group--as if it were no worse a flaw than a weak bladder.

himself may not necessarily be a dehumanizing force, but the narrative itself frames his people as inhuman.

Garion defeats Torak not through force, but by convincing him that he is unwanted and unloved, telling him, ““You’re a God, but you are nothing. In all the universe there is not one person--not one thing--that loves you. You are alone and empty, and even if you kill me, I will still win. Unloved and despised, you will howl out your miserable life to the end of days.”³⁰⁴ Garion’s speech seems emotionally satisfying, and both the structure of the text and the editorializing indicate that it is the right thing to do, the ultimate heroic gesture. Torak responds by rushing directly onto Garion’s blade, where he is utterly consumed by the Orb. It is difficult to imagine a situation in which bullying someone into suicide is right or good or heroic, but in the world that Eddings has created, it is appropriate.

Although the books’ denial of human agency on every level is dismaying, Eddings indicates in several places that his work is to be taken with a grain of salt. Whether Eddings regards his own work as satire so dry as to be virtually indiscernible, or simply a cynical exploitation of existing tropes, is unclear; and even though the success of an indiscernible satire is debatable, the series was a commercial success that made its author into a multimillionaire.

Guy Gavriel Kay’s *Fionavar Tapestry*, on the other hand, takes fantasy very seriously indeed. Kay is a Canadian who worked with J.R.R. Tolkien’s son Christopher on the remaining Tolkien manuscripts, aiding in the editing of *The Silmarillion*. In his own work, five University of Toronto students are whisked away to the magical land of Fionavar, the first land of which all others are an echo, ostensibly to serve as “Red Indians to the Court of

³⁰⁴ Eddings, *Enchanter’s Endgame* 587.

King James”³⁰⁵ for the fiftieth anniversary of King Ailell’s reign, but actually because the wizard Loren has foreseen that the evil god Rakoth Maugrim will arise after a thousand years of imprisonment, and these five are the only ones who can stop him.

The trilogy largely dispenses with the overtly Christian elements of Tolkien’s work. The people of Fionavar are subject to gods and goddesses, most of whom are benevolent or at least sympathetic, but forbidden to act on the tapestry of the world. The books are rife with human sacrifice--not the kind of horrific sacrifice that Mercedes Lackey will use as a marker of evil in her fantasies, to be discussed below and in Chapter 6, but willing sacrifice that is presented as both a tragic waste and an act of heroism.

Rakoth Maugrim the Unraveller is an elemental evil “who had entered into the worlds from outside the walls of time, from beyond the Weaver’s Halls, with no thread of the Tapestry marked with his name.”³⁰⁶ He does not seem to tempt ordinary people, but he occasionally wins the allegiance of people who see in him the potential for them to get what they want as well, and fight not because they are naturally quarrelsome, but because they have competing interests. Creatures such as the svart alfar (dark elves), Avaia’s brood (carnivorous black swans), and the slaug-riding urgach serve Rakoth Maugrim, suggesting that there is a biological component to evil, but it is not the deciding factor. Darien, son of Rakoth Maugrim by the rape of one of the students, is tormented by voices that urge him to join them, and he has some of Rakoth Maugrim’s powers, but even despite the loss and rejection that drive him to his father, when he chooses, he chooses to ally himself with the Light.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Guy Gavriel Kay, *The Summer Tree, The Fionavar Tapestry* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1995), 25.

³⁰⁶ Kay, *The Darkest Road, The Fionavar Tapestry*, 733.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. 735.

Rakoth Maugrim himself has a body, but no face--only a pair of eyes. In order to release him from the chains underneath the mountain, Galadan had to sever Maugrim's hand, and the stump still oozes burning blood³⁰⁸--so, like Torak, his body is a disabled one. His stronghold, Starkadh, is in the far north, and desolate:

When he went to wash his face in the river the water was oily and something bit his finger, drawing blood. [...] It was eerily silent. The Ungarch ran sluggishly, without sound. Aside from whatever had bit him, there was no sign of life anywhere. [...] No birds sang, even on a morning in midsummer. It was a place of waste, of desolation, and across the river stood his father's towers, challenging the sky, so black they seemed to swallow the light.³⁰⁹

Where the Belgariad deals with characters who are not free, the Fionavar Tapestry is very concerned with the idea of freedom and choice. The creator in this universe is the Weaver, who has ordained a design, but deliberately introduced random threads. Rakoth Maugrim comes from outside of the Tapestry, so it is only the random threads, those dependent entirely on human choice, that can work against him. The price of free choice, however, is the acceptance of consequences, and in the Fionavar Tapestry, these are very costly. There is no single benevolent power pressuring characters to do right and rewarding them when they obey; instead, there is a balance that must be struck.

In Kay's trilogy, the fight against Rakoth Maugrim must be total war, with the sentient beings of Fionavar conscripted not just against their will but against their natures.

³⁰⁸ Kay, *The Summer Tree*. *The Fionavar Tapestry*, 242.

³⁰⁹ Kay, *The Darkest Road*. *The Fionavar Tapestry*, 730.

This results in stirring moments of reconciliation as feuding powers band together to fight Rakoth Maugrim, notes that are also sounded in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Elemental evil's ability to lead well-meaning people to put aside their differences, shrugging off the cloak of good-faith disagreement to band together for the sake of what really matters, has always been a powerful argument for evil's functionality, if not its existence. However, amid these moments, Kay acknowledges that some of the things that must be done in a fight against elemental evil are deeply unjust.

Mercedes Lackey, one of the urban fantasy authors whose work will be discussed in Chapter 6, also writes high fantasy. Her most notable high fantasy creation is Valdemar, a country where the peace is kept by Heralds and their magical equine Companions. The Valdemar novels subvert or challenge high fantasy conventions in several ways, even as they uphold them in others.

Valdemar is mildly utopian. Despite being at a medieval level of technology, it boasts a school lunch program, legal equality for the sexes, and recognition of same-sex partnerships. Order is kept by the Heralds, who are selected by their magical Companions precisely for their virtue and incorruptibility; and the king or queen must also be a Herald. To the west are the abodes of the Tayledras, areas poisoned with magic, the aftermath of an ancient war. The Tayledras live tribally in treehouses (granted most of the comforts of middle-class twentieth-century life, such as hot baths) while cleansing the area of wild magic. But if aspects of these nations' social structures are unusually progressive for a high fantasy, Lackey's conception of evil is not.

Her fullest discussion of evil in this world occurs in the Mage Winds trilogy (1991-1993), in which Princess Elspeth of Valdemar and Darkwind K'Sheyne, the Tayledras mage,

battle Mornelithe Falconsbane, an enemy who is apparently the reincarnation of every other inhuman enemy that Valdemar has faced since its creation, and Ancar of Hardorn, a hostile king from a neighbouring country, with whom Falconsbane eventually forms an alliance.

It soon becomes clear to the reader that the worlds of both the Heralds and the Tayledras are infused with a low-grade paranoia--a cheerful recapitulation of David Rheubottom's Macedonian village of Crna Gora, where the way to guard against evil is to rigorously maintain boundaries, and those who let their vigilance slip are said to deserve their fates. Valdemar's weaponsmaster encourages Princess Elspeth to adopt "An attitude. A state of awareness, one where you size everyone up as a potential enemy, and everything as a potential weapon. And I mean *everyone* and *everything*."³¹⁰ When Elspeth protests, "I can't live like that[.] [...] Nobody can. [...] Can they?"³¹¹ her trainer replies, "Personally I think no royalty can afford to live *without* an outlook like that."³¹² One of her friends chimes in, "It doesn't have to poison you or your life, just make you more aware of things going on around you."³¹³ Meanwhile, among the Tayledras, Darkwind's assumption is, "when in doubt--assume the worst. The Hawkbrothers stayed alive by that rule, and it had always been the precept Darkwind operated on."³¹⁴

Statements such as these point to a particularly American fascination with security, and the conviction that the world is full of enemies that have to be defended against. This is borne out by the picture Darkwind paints of the world outside the Tayledras community

³¹⁰ Mercedes Lackey, *Winds of Fate* (New York: DAW, 1991), 12.

³¹¹ Ibid. 12.

³¹² Ibid. 12.

³¹³ Ibid. 12.

³¹⁴ Ibid. 261.

when he demands, “*Did we know then how bad the area was outside of our own borders? [...]* [W]hatever was out there tended to leave us alone while we were strong.”³¹⁵

However, the enemies they face justify Darkwind’s eternal vigilance. Both Falconsbane and Ancar are pedophiles who practice blood magic³¹⁶, and enjoy causing harm to individuals and subjugating them to their will. Falconsbane prefers subtle and complicated plans that reek of sadomasochism. He hates the Tayledras, but even more, he hates the intelligent nonhuman creatures that populate Tayledras lands, seeing them as “Wretched beasts, [...] no more than jumped-up constructs.”³¹⁷ Ancar, on the other hand, is a spoiled young king who has been manipulated by his political rivals into starting a war with Valdemar. Taught by those same rivals to feel entitled to absolute power, he is relatively ungifted in magic. The danger he poses lies in his willingness to pursue his own aims without regard for any long-term consequences, so that he uses his land and his subjects in ways that shock the far more powerful but also far more practical Falconsbane.

Evil is dehumanizing and polluting here, and Ancar and Falconsbane, although they are working together, are also locked in a bitter power struggle against each other. Evil is not, however, disembodied or particularly tempting, and only subtly palpable, with characters able to sense that something is *off*.

The Harry Potter books, also aimed at a younger audience, are some of the most popular children’s books ever written. Published between 1997 and 2007, they have sold 500 million copies as of 2013. Harry Potter, an abused orphan, discovers on his eleventh birthday that he is a wizard, and has been invited to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft

³¹⁵ Ibid. 63.

³¹⁶ The importance of blood magic to Lackey’s moral scheme will be discussed in Chapter 6.

³¹⁷ Mercedes Lackey, *Winds of Change* (New York: DAW, 1993), 364.

and Wizardry, an environment where he thrives. But he is hounded by Voldemort, the dark wizard who killed Harry's parents and tried to kill him. In each of the first six books, Harry, his friends, and his teachers manage to thwart Voldemort in a way that staves off the worst, but the wizard nevertheless gets a little more powerful, and the story a bit darker, with each book, until in the seventh, Voldemort is defeated.

These books do not fit neatly into the realm of high fantasy: the wizarding world is not a *world*, per se, but a carefully concealed facet of the ordinary world. The beginnings of the books almost always involve a brief sojourn in London, and sometimes the books use the urban fantasy technique of introducing magical explanations for everyday phenomena. But for the most part, the border between the Muggle (non-magical) world and the wizarding world is solid, so I have called them high fantasy, acknowledging that this is not an entirely satisfactory designation, and that they may in fact indicate a change in the way that fantasy genres work.

Voldemort is a single morally reprehensible person--having grown up, like Harry, as an abused orphan, although there is little indication that he ever found a network of friends and family of affinity as Harry did--who has amassed enough magic to make himself quite powerful. There is the suggestion that his drive for power and immortality led him to perform magic that turned him from an ordinary human being capable of ordinary human badness into something supernaturally evil.³¹⁸ What is more interesting, however, is how other characters react to him, to Harry, and to Voldemort's second rising to power.

Voldemort enjoyed an apparent reign of terror before Harry's birth, a reign that was ended abruptly when Harry's mother died to protect him, creating a magic that made

³¹⁸ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2007), 89.

Voldemort's curse rebound, disembodying him and leaving him weak. Although there was an attempt to bring his accomplices to justice, many wizards who worked with Voldemort were later at pains to insist that he had been controlling them. This means that the wizarding world would have borne a small-scale resemblance to post-WWII Germany (a link is reinforced by the emphasis by Voldemort and other dark wizards on purity of wizarding blood)--frightened and traumatized people rubbing shoulders with those who were, willingly or unwillingly, complicit in atrocities that had become commonplace but are now universally condemned.

Polite wizarding society has a horror of all things associated with Voldemort, and his name is never mentioned. Harry, linked to Voldemort by the failed curse, becomes an object of suspicion, a situation which invokes Ricoeur's ethic of pollution, but Dumbledore, the headmaster, dispels his fears by telling him, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."³¹⁹ Eventually, Harry is able to use the link against Voldemort: he has a piece of Voldemort's soul, and by allowing Voldemort to kill him for the sake of the world, not only does he allow that part of Voldemort's soul to be destroyed; he sacrifices himself for the sake of the world in the same way that his mother sacrificed herself for his sake, and the sacrifice confers the same protection on the world.³²⁰ Harry becomes a Christ figure--ironic, in a series that has been denounced by certain sects of Christianity as promoting occultism.

Initially, Voldemort is a personal threat to Harry and his friends, but as Voldemort amasses more power and contacts old allies, he infiltrates the higher levels of wizarding society, and its systems begin to warp to accommodate him, at first because they are too

³¹⁹ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1998), 245.

³²⁰ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* 591.

confident in their own superiority to realize that they are being manipulated, and later because they are under Voldemort's outright control. One of the horrors of the series is the fragility of the wizarding world's goodness, and the ease with which its institutions can be turned, with the media reporting that Harry Potter is a dangerous criminal and possibly a murderer.³²¹ Shying away from the mere mention of Voldemort's name is no protection against him: it turns into refusal to acknowledge him, and then into complicity with him. Although individuals are willing to aid Harry, society itself becomes oriented against him, and ordinary people are pressed into the position of enemies, even though they are the very people that he is fighting for.

Evil in the Harry Potter books has continuity in the personage of Voldemort, but the degree to which it resembles Sauron and the qualities set out in Chapter 2 changes. In the earlier books, evil is attractive to those without power. In the later ones, evil is never alluring, precisely, but as it acquires control over the world's systems it becomes the easier, safer choice. It pollutes, not the landscape, but human relationships. To Harry, who is sensitive to his connection with Voldemort, it is palpable, but it can catch others unawares. The members of Voldemort's inner circle tend to be contemptible people in most respects, but in later books, it is revealed that they still care deeply for family members; and while in the earlier books, the members of Slytherin House are uniformly terrible, this too becomes more complicated as the series progresses. And evil is disembodied in the earlier books, but gains a body in the later ones.³²²

³²¹ Ibid. 171.

³²² Interestingly, Voldemort lacks a nose, which makes his countenance snakelike, but also arguably places him, with Torak and Rakoth Maugrim, in the realm of disability and disfigurement.

This changing portrait of evil has a number of effects on the texts. At the most basic level, it means that although the books have a certain symmetry, some elements of the threats that Harry faces are always fresh. On the thematic level, it asserts that narrative shorthand has limited usefulness in the moral sphere: it is not tropes that make evil, but the ways in which one treats others, and the degree to which one participates in systems that devalue human life.

Notable Exceptions

Tolkienesque evil is a staple in high fantasy, and the books I have surveyed hitherto all partake of it to one degree or another. However, its commonness does not translate to necessity, and no survey of high fantasy would be complete without the acknowledgement of texts that complicate and challenge the scheme of absolute good versus absolute evil.

Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea books--initially a trilogy, but now comprising six books--are aimed at young readers. The first book was published in 1968, the most recent in 2001. Rather than a single, unifying evil that is fought progressively over the course of the books, the books feature antagonism from a different source each time. The first three books deal with the wizard Ged fighting his Jungian shadow, oppressive priests, and finally a wizard whose attempts to achieve immortality have punched a way through to the afterlife--a Greek-style land of shades--which has upset the balance of the world. The last book of the initial trilogy ends with Ged being borne away by dragons to his home island of Gont, presumably to die. However, Le Guin says in a 1993 paper delivered to the *Worlds Apart* institute, she came to realize that the heroic tradition in which she was writing engaged

with gender in ways that she found problematic.³²³ In 1990, she added a fourth installment, *Tehanu*, about Ged's life on Gont with a former priestess he met and rescued in the second book and the little girl, Tehanu, that they have adopted. (In the intervening years, she also published "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," an essay that further critiques heroic narratives.)

In 2001 a fifth and sixth book--the short story collection *Tales from Earthsea*, and *The Other Wind*--were published. *The Other Wind* returned to the idea of the land of death, revealing that the land of shades is itself a violation of the balance. The threat this time has its roots in the established order of things, which now proves unfair and unsustainable. When the wall surrounding the dead is torn down, Tehanu turns into a dragon and leaves human lands with the other dragons, and the dead cross the wall and dissolve back into the stuff of the world, truly free.

The Earthsea books are notable for their skillful creation of a world in which there are many ways of living, many kinds of people, and many ways of seeing the truth; for their resolute focus on the people *around* the designated hero, and the importance of their daily unheroic lives; for their refusal to locate antagonism in one area or person or race; and because the vast majority of the major characters are non-white (a decision that unfortunately was not respected by those who designed cover art and cast the movie *Earthsea*).

³²³ Ursula Le Guin, *Earthsea Revisioned* (Cambridge: Children's Literature New England and Green Bay Publications, 1993), 10-12.

Kath Filmer, in *Scepticism and Hope in Fantasy Literature*, criticizes the books, particularly *The Farthest Shore*, for being pessimistic.³²⁴ Filmer, however, is writing from a Christian perspective³²⁵ that appears to regard anything short of the guarantee of eternity in heaven as pessimistic³²⁶, and Le Guin's Daoist cosmology does not sit well with her. Even so, Le Guin *returns* to the bleak afterlife depicted in *The Farthest Shore*, and clarifies that it itself is an upset of the cosmic balance.

Diana Wynne Jones' *The Dark Lord of Derkholm* (1998), a young adult fantasy set in a magical land, parodies high fantasies that employ elemental evil. As in many Portal/Quest fantasies, people cross over from our own world in order to fight and defeat the evil Dark Lord. However, in this case they have not come by chance, or been chosen by supernatural forces; they pay a great deal to a Mr. Chesney to join one of his "pilgrim parties" (or can be given the journey as a gift, marked "expendable," and dealt a heroic death³²⁷), and as the land lacks a genuine Dark Lord, the wizards who live there take turns playing him. The pilgrims conceive of themselves as good fighting evil. Unaware of the other parties³²⁸ or the lengths gone to in order to accommodate them, the majority of them believe that whatever destruction they do is justified in their fight against the great evil plaguing the land. However, in reality they are a steady drain on the land's resources, and all of its systems have deformed to accommodate them: for example, the university no longer allows pure research, but only that which will directly serve the pilgrim parties.³²⁹

³²⁴ Kath Filmer, *Scepticism and Hope in Twentieth Century Fantasy Literature* (Bowling Green OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1992), 50.

³²⁵ Ibid. iii.

³²⁶ Ibid. 50.

³²⁷ Diana Wynne Jones, *Dark Lord of Derkholm* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 62. Her non-fiction book *The Tough Guide to Fantasy Land* (London: Vista, 1996) also pokes fun at the Dark Lord in fantasy.

³²⁸ Ibid. 46

³²⁹ Ibid. 28.

Harm and antagonism come in the form of the bankerish Earth-man Mr. Chesney, whose wishes are enforced by his fortune and by the demon in his pocket. Protagonist Derk, an animal-loving family man and this year's Dark Lord, must perform essential evil to Mr. Chesney's specifications while doing his best to mitigate the harm done by the forces of good. *The Dark Lord of Derkholm* is a critique of the high fantasy trope, but further, Charles Butler points out, "a lot of what happens in *Dark Lord* can be applied quite easily to the exploitation of vulnerable environments and cultures by wealthy, transient tourism in our own world."³³⁰

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995-2000) is also aimed at young adult readers, and was written as an atheist response to the Christian proselytizing in C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. The books detail the travels of Lyra, a mischievous and inquisitive girl from an Oxford in an alternate universe, and Will, a boy from this universe, as they fight to protect Dust, a cosmic substance that is both the stuff of the universe and the source of intelligence, from the forces of a repressive Church.

Good and evil are complex in these books. Virtually all of the characters act in good faith, doing what they believe to be right; however, Pullman argues that good faith can make for bad behaviour, as when scientists remove essential components of children's souls in an effort to keep them morally pure; or when a priest is entrusted to carry out Lyra's assassination.³³¹ The solution for Lyra, for Dust, and for the entire universe, is to have Lyra and Will reenact the Fall from paradise. One of the characters, Mary, recounts an explanation from an angel:

³³⁰ Charles Butler, *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children's Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, and Susan Cooper* (Lanham MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), 127.

³³¹ Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 71-72.

She said that all the history of human life has been a struggle between wisdom and stupidity. She and the rebel angels, the followers of wisdom, have always tried to open minds; the Authority and the churches have always tried to keep them closed. She gave me many examples from my world. [...]

And for most of that time, wisdom has had to work in secret, whispering her words, moving like a spy through the humble places of the world while the courts and palaces are occupied by her enemies.³³²

The result of this inversion is that the moral status of many characters seems designed to subvert reader expectations. The angel Metatron is a deadly enemy of Lyra, while the witch queen is a dear friend.

Evil here carries virtually none of the characteristics outlined in Chapter 2. In fact, the only thing that makes it tempting is that it looks so very much like good. Pullman's use of evil is better informed by Philip Cole and Fred Katz than by J.R.R. Tolkien: moral certainty, the thing that purifies the world, that quiets the conscience by assuring one that one has done an ugly and painful job in the service of the greater good, is the thing to be feared.

Although in the examples I have given here there is a fair amount of variation, evil in high fantasy tends heavily towards the Tolkienesque, with innovation more common in the years immediately following the release of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, diminishing as

³³² Ibid. 479.

fantasy developed its own formula, and returning as authors found a way to transcend the formula. (Of course, it is possible to find innovative fantasies as well as formulaic ones at any point in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but I have chosen a mere handful of the ones that posterity has marked as important.)

Although there is a trend towards giving evil more complex motivations, high fantasy has traditionally relied on elemental evil, and there are still series being produced today that rely on it as the antagonist. But evil as our culture understands it, as both Terry Eagleton and Philip Cole point out, is its own cause, and many of the books listed above do nothing to expand on that. To appeal to it in a story is one thing; to appeal to it in everyday discourse, to explain the motivations for real-life atrocities, brings us no closer to understanding, and can in fact make the situation worse: if all stakeholders in a situation see themselves as heroes battling elemental evil, then there can be no negotiation, all tactics are fair game, and peace can come only when the other is obliterated.

Authors such as Ursula Le Guin, Philip Pullman, and J.K. Rowling have shown that this is not the way fantasy *has* to be; that one can partake of wonder without subscribing to reductivist morality. Urban fantasy, I argue, does just that.

Chapter 4: Magic Takes Manhattan: Urban Fantasy

The Lord of the Rings trilogy redefined the fantasy genre, locating it solidly within the pastoral tradition. The book and its reception reflected Tolkien's concerns about industry and modernity, a tradition of Victorian medievalism that saw the rural, medieval way of life as a corrective to urban decay, and the new American ideal of leaving the city to go to the suburbs. If the land being represented was not the bucolic splendor of the Shire, then perhaps it was the sublime landscape of the Immanent Grove or Gwen Ystrat or even Mordor itself. In this scheme, the wild lands are a source of authenticity, free from the constraints of culture, and if they are dangerous, it is an invigorating danger that allows people to achieve their true potential.

Frederick Reenstjerna, in his article "Paradise or Purgatory: The City in French and British Children's Literature," uses works aimed at children to show that British literature is far more critical of the urban experience than French literature. Where French literature associates the city with order and civilization, English literature depicts the city as a dangerous, dirty, crowded source of evil.³³³ Although Reenstjerna focuses on children's literature, he traces the impulses for this dichotomy to the French colonial enterprise versus the idea of "[t]he rural ideal [as] the seat of power as well as the 'good life' in English reality and mythology"³³⁴, demonstrating that these views permeated the literary cultures of their respective nations.

³³³ Frederick Reenstjerna, "Paradise or Purgatory: The City in French and British Children's Literature," *Cincinnati Romance Review* 9 (1990): 90.

³³⁴ Ibid. 95.

William Cronon problematizes these dualistic views in “The Trouble With Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” He points out that wilderness is a cultural construct. The Romantics, picking up on biblical traditions that regarded it as the abode of Satan but also the place where Christ had encountered angels, and where early Christians went to practice asceticism³³⁵, saw it as a place where the supernatural seethed beneath the surface of the world³³⁶, and argued for the sacralization of wilderness, an argument that was taken up in various ways by white males of the middle and upper classes³³⁷, particularly in America. It is no surprise that Tolkien, as a white, male, middle-class Christian and a nature-lover writing about the supernatural in what Veldman has identified as the romantic tradition, found these ideas appealing, and communicated them to a wider audience. However, their proliferation has had political implications:

This nostalgia for a passing frontier way of life inevitably implied ambivalence, if not downright hostility, toward modernity and all that it represented. If one saw the wild lands of the frontier as freer, truer, and more natural than other, more modern places, then one was also inclined to see the cities and factories of urban-industrial civilization as confining, false, and artificial.³³⁸

This, Cronon says, has implications that may actually lead to the opposite of what Tolkien would have wanted to accomplish:

³³⁵ Cronon 4.

³³⁶ Ibid. 4.

³³⁷ Ibid. 8-9.

³³⁸ Ibid. 7-8.

To the extent that we celebrate wilderness as the measure with which we judge civilization, we reproduce the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles. We thereby leave ourselves little hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable, honorable human place in nature might actually look like.

Worse: to the extent that we live in an urban-industrial civilization but at the same time pretend that our real home is in the wilderness, to just that extent we give ourselves permission to evade responsibility for the lives we actually lead. [...] We benefit from the intricate and all too invisible networks with which [civilization] shelters us, all the while pretending that these things are not an essential part of who we are. By imagining that our true home is in the wilderness, we forgive ourselves the homes we actually inhabit.³³⁹

Cronon points out that the reinforcement of this dualism means that places like the inner city are “fallen” and not worth working to improve, and that this replicates problematic class dynamics.³⁴⁰ He adds, “Wilderness gets us into trouble only if we imagine that this experience of wonder and otherness is limited to the remote corners of the planet, or that it somehow depends on pristine landscapes we ourselves do not inhabit.”³⁴¹ Or other worlds, a fantasy enthusiast might add. He would prefer to see a middle ground where “we learn ways of imagining a better world for all of us: humans and nonhumans, rich people and poor, women and men, First Worlders and Third Worlders, white folks and people of color,

³³⁹ Ibid. 11.

³⁴⁰ Ibid. 15.

³⁴¹ Ibid. 18.

consumers and producers--a world better for humanity in all of its diversity and for all the rest of nature too."³⁴²

Cronon's argument is also made, implicitly, by urban fantasy. On the simplest level, transferring a fairy from a forest glade to a department store window emphasizes that the department store window and the forest glade are part of the same world, foregrounding and thereby challenging the conventions and assumptions that say a fairy belongs in one and not the other. But fantasy set in cities also urges readers to become aware of their relationships to urban space and the people they share it with.

Urban fantasy, of course, is only one kind of fiction set in cities, although its relationship with the greater tradition of city fiction varies by book and by author. Diana Festa-McCormick writes:

Cities were not spared by Balzac, Dickens, and Zola, who alternately knelt in adoration at the altars of Paris and London [...] and inveighed against their diabolical power to corrupt. That twofold attitude toward the magnetic appeal of cities was assumed from the earliest antiquity, probably as soon as nomadic tribes encountered sedentary villages, plundered them, and ended in being assimilated by their cultures.³⁴³

While acknowledging that the trope of urban corruption is millennia old, Festa-McCormick cites the Industrial Revolution as the catalyst for modern depictions of the city as

³⁴² Ibid. 16.

³⁴³ Diana Festa-McCormick, *The City as Catalyst: A Study of Ten Novels* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1979), 10.

inherently bad, saying, “The country more and more stood for integrity and wholesomeness, where urban centers appeared as forces of evil and corruption.” This sentiment, she says, is even stronger in America:

All of them, the Americans more determinedly than the Europeans, appear to be convinced that a curse hangs upon the tentacular grip of the metropolis. Cruelly, devilishly, they mock all the utopian dreams of the nation that had once accepted it as a civic duty to pursue happiness, immune from the malediction that doomed the older continent.³⁴⁴

This, she says, provided “fertile material”³⁴⁵ for modern novelists such as John Dos Passos, Jules Romains, and Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio³⁴⁶, who rely on a sort of cinematic technique to represent the liveliness of the urban environment. Robert Alter writes that this technique involves “the practice of conducting the narrative more and more through the moment-by-moment experience--sensory, visceral, and mental--of the main character or characters.”³⁴⁷ Alter writes--of the European urban experience in particular, as he sees the American urban experience as fundamentally different:

Whatever the new objective realities, from architecture to public transportation to the economy, it felt different for individuals to live in this new urban zone--to walk the city streets, to enter into the urban crowds, to be exposed to the exponential

³⁴⁴ Ibid. 14.

³⁴⁵ Ibid. 13.

³⁴⁶ Ibid. 12.

³⁴⁷ Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2005), x.

increase of noise and bustle, to inhabit an apartment building or a tenement in the new demographic density of the city. The perception of the fundamental categories of time and space, the boundaries of the self, and the autonomy of the individual began to change.³⁴⁸

Fiction, Alter argues, attempts to capture this shift. And in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, he finds what he calls the "urban pastoral," which depicts the city as a place of hope and renewal, and in which "urban experience, seen quite vividly in its abundant particularities, can provide the sense of invigoration, harmony with one's surroundings, and enrapturing aesthetic revelation that is traditionally associated with the green world of pastoral."³⁴⁹ Further, he says, "All of this makes for a certain aestheticization of the city, but the perception of urban beauty is grounded not in any idea that the city is necessarily a pretty sight, but rather in an awareness that it manifests the engaging multifariousness of modern life itself."³⁵⁰

Although urban fantasy's links to the bulk of mainstream realist city fiction are tenuous (and Alter is adamant that in the body of work that he is examining, American texts ought not to be studied alongside European ones), the above description could just as easily apply to the work of any of the four authors featured in the next chapters of the current study, and indeed many in the present chapter.

Why would a subgenre akin to the urban pastoral flourish, beginning in America, sixty years after Woolf was writing? Part of the answer may lie in innovation in the fantasy

³⁴⁸ Ibid. xi.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. 105.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. 119.

genre itself, and a desire to escape the pseudomedieval milieux of high fantasy. As I will show, many early urban fantasies rely heavily on juxtaposition--on the violation of the expectation that the urban environment is the site of the mundane, the workaday, the real. Farah Mendlesohn writes, focusing specifically on intrusion-style urban fantasies, "These new fantasies [...] brought the fantastic into the cities as a way (1) of providing the cities of the modern Americas (and they are almost all American) with complex historical layers; and (2) of saying, 'the modern world is boring, there must be something more than this.'"³⁵¹ But another part of the reason for the growth of urban fantasy may answer Cronon's criticisms, and attempt to address urban decay, which in the 1980s and 1990s was an increasingly urgent problem in America. Although poverty and the decline of industry and employment foster urban decay irrespective of national borders, the tendency of American cities to be planned around industrial manufacturing, to collect the poor into "superblocks," and to have been designed by urban planners whose biggest priority was accommodating automobile traffic resulted in a different kind of decay. Affluent people, mostly white, moved to the low-density, car-dependent suburbs. Poor people, meanwhile, remained in the dense downtown cores, where functional neighbourhoods had been bisected by highways, and the poverty of the tax base discouraged municipalities from investing in public transit, education, recreational programs, and other initiatives that increase quality of life. William Hudnut, writing in 1998 after the turnaround had already begun, notes:

Since the end of World War II, many central cities have experienced population loss. Brains and talent have moved out. Jobs and businesses have grown

³⁵¹ Mendlesohn 147.

in the suburbs. Cities have lost political clout. They have been hollowed out. All too frequently, downtown buildings and industrial sites have decayed, and the tax base has eroded. Taxes have risen, crime and grime have increased, and inner-ring neighborhoods have deteriorated, as has the quality of education. Urban disinvestment has taken its toll.

But that is not the end of the story. There's good news tonight. Today, America's cities are on the rebound, struggling to be reborn, hurting and healing simultaneously. The urban horizon, often perceived as dark, contains glimmers of light that will, I believe, burst forth in the 21st century.³⁵²

Hudnut's study--conducted for a political audience rather than an academic one--points out that one of the problems facing cities at the time was a public relations problem.

Americans despaired of rehabilitating "depressed and decaying"³⁵³ areas. In spite of the general spirit of pessimism, however, urban planners had had success with a number of initiatives, and Hudnut lays out plans for further progress: the halting of sprawl, a focus on making neighbourhoods walkable, and the development of amenities are key.³⁵⁴

While many factors go into the production of creative works, the development of new genres, and the extension of genre boundaries, in light of Hudnut's work it is possible to see the development of urban fantasy in America as, at least in part, a grassroots effort at urban renewal, making the city attractive by reinfusing it with magic, while simultaneously celebrating the features of urban neighbourhoods that make them livable.

³⁵² William H. Hudnut, *Cities on the Rebound: A Vision for Urban America* (Washington DC: The Urban Lands Institute, 1998), ix.

³⁵³ Ibid. 1.

³⁵⁴ Ibid. 113.

Urban fantasies favour a particular *kind* of urban space: dense areas, and downtowns. Very few of the fantasy books I have found are set in suburbs. This could be, in part, because suburbs have fewer common areas, a lower tolerance for oddity, and less juxtapositional value, juxtaposition being a driving force in early urban fantasy. But these early fantasies also favour green space: for example, many fantasies set in New York City rely in some way on Central Park.

Protagonists tend to be straight white able-bodied single people, although they have friends of different sexual orientations and ethnicities. When the genre is established, female protagonists are common. Farah Mendlesohn has noted tendencies, in the urban fantasies of this early middle stage, for the narrative to be structured as a sort of forcible seduction in which female characters are persuaded to accept the fantastic's intrusion into their lives.³⁵⁵ But another reason why many protagonists of early urban fantasy are women might have to do with then-prevalent ideas about connection, community, acceptance, and nonviolence being more feminine values, despite their utility for the population at large. Authors may also have wished, given the expectations created around the high fantasy genre, to select protagonists less likely to be expected to solve problems through combat.

These characters are not often particularly affluent, but they have jobs that afford them a great deal of unstructured time. They are freelance writers, musicians, artists, sometimes waitresses. This is both convenient to the plot--as when events significantly disrupt their lives, their livelihoods are not in serious danger--and meaningful in terms of theme. These are people who have very little, who are often estranged from their families

³⁵⁵ Mendlesohn 154-155.

and depend on friends and connections for what they need and are willing to provide in turn. They take public transit, use parks, and often thrive on an artistic community that cannot readily be found outside the city. They benefit from things that make the city better, and suffer from things that make the city worse, and do not have the resources to divorce themselves from its fortunes. They are, in short, connected to their environments in a way that Tolkien might be proud of.

Urban fantasy as a subgenre makes a concerted attempt to be progressive, openly denouncing racism, sexism, and classism. One characteristic of virtually all urban fantasy is ambivalence towards systems: government, policing, organized religion, organized crime, corporations, and the military are ineffectual against the magical threat, or a cover for the threat themselves, or a needless complication for characters who are dealing with the threat. Handy antagonists include covert branches of the government, corporate bigwigs, crime bosses, and cults--other *kinds* of systems, and their heads. This is an issue that will be explored in further detail in the next four chapters.

Notable Texts

I have shown that the city--London in particular--was the site of several pre-Tolkienian fantasies. Only twenty-five years elapsed before cities once again became a legitimate object of consideration for fantasists, this time in America.

Fritz Lieber's *Our Lady of Darkness*, from 1977, is one of the forerunners of urban fantasy. Taking place in the fictional San Francisco neighbourhood of Corona Heights, it evokes more horror than wonder; in fact, it appears to be a well disguised Lovecraftian

Cthulhu Mythos story. However, the city itself is the stuff of magic. The antagonist--who ultimately manifests as an animated, malevolent pile of shredded paper--is apparently inscrutable and motiveless, as is appropriate to horror fiction and particularly Cthulhu Mythos stories, but it is defeated by an incantation: the protagonist's girlfriend, a musician, who cries, "In the names of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, the names of Pythagoras, Newton, and Einstein, by Bertrand Russell, William James, and Eustace Hayden, begone! All inharmonious and disorderly shapes and forces, depart at once!"³⁵⁶ The Lovecraftian touches, the lack of agency on the part of the protagonist, and the focus on fear rather than wonder mark this as a horror novel rather than a fantasy, but Leiber reintroduces magic to the city--not an intrusive magic, but an *inherent* magic.

Little, Big, published in 1983, is generally accepted to be the first modern urban fantasy. The chronicle of an upstate New York family whose fortunes are entwined with those of the fairies, it begins in what was, for the book, modern times, reaching back to the turn of the twentieth century, with its fairy photography and folly houses, and progressing decades into the future as well. The interweaving narratives revolve around a house, Edgewood, itself at the centre of surrounding towns arranged like a pentacle. In fact, the book is structured like the house, presenting different façades at different points, with scenes unfolding like Edgewood's unexpected rooms. An unnamed New York City is one of the locales, and although it is used in part as a foil to the sylvan surroundings of Edgewood, parts of it--Old Law Farm, for example, and the gated park containing the Mouse Drinkwater Stone--are the rightful domain of magic.

³⁵⁶ Fritz Leiber, *Our Lady of Darkness* (New York: Putnam, 1977), 177.

There is no enemy to be overcome in *Little, Big*, only the surprise of seeing how the fairy plan--the Tale--unfolds, and perhaps some dismay at the extent of their machinations, which span centuries and ensnare free-willed people to a degree reminiscent of Greek tragedy. The closest thing to an antagonist is perhaps the Lecturer, Russell Eigenblick, the tyrant reincarnation of Frederick Barbarossa whose forces sweep across America, eroding the infrastructure and causing shortages. But he never threatens Edgewood or its inhabitants, never even draws close, and he too has been used by the fairies as part of the Tale.

Unlike many of the novels to be studied here³⁵⁷, the magic of *Little, Big* is not structured along moral lines. Right and wrong are human constructs; the faeries are concerned only with the Tale, and they accomplish its telling in ways that challenge human morality--for example, through the highly destructive campaign of Barbarossa, or the protagonist's affair with his wife's sister, or August Drinkwater's impregnation of dozens of women at a time when pregnancy out of wedlock was a scandal. In the latter two cases, the humans who have been harmed by these acts console themselves that it is all part of the Tale, which offers no choice to its participants, only comfort after the fact.

Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels are another early entry into the urban fantasy genre, with the first book, *The Colour of Magic*, also published in 1983. Pratchett is a British author, and although British urban fantasy retains its own distinctive character, after some consideration I have decided not to separate it from the discussion of American urban fantasy.

³⁵⁷ With the possible exception of the aforementioned Belgariad, where the gulf between ordinary morality and the heroic morality of the Prophecy is not recognized.

The Discworld novels are arguably early examples of what Farah Mendlesohn calls Immersive fantasy. Unlike Portal-Quest fantasy, wherein the reader learns about the world through the eyes of a naïve narrator, Immersive fantasy plunges a reader into the world where he or she is expected to experience some initial dislocation. Although Rincewind, the point-of-view character in the first book, is a lifelong resident of Discworld and the city of Ankh-Morpork, this dislocation is mitigated first of all because in this first novel Rincewind is escorting Twoflower, a traveller from afar, and secondly because unlike Miéville's *New Crobuzon*, the city is populated with stock fantasy characters who set up reader expectations, even if it is only to gleefully violate them.

Subsequent entries in the series are fully immersive. Like Miéville, Pratchett describes the city lovingly, but in terms that depict it as organic, exploitative, and dirty:

Against the dark screen of night, Vimes had a vision of Ankh-Morpork. It wasn't a city, it was a *process*, a weight on the world that distorted the land for hundreds of miles around. People who'd never see it in their whole life nevertheless spent their life working for it. Thousands and thousands of green acres were part of it, forests were part of it. It drew in and consumed...

...and gave back the dung from its pens and the soot from its chimneys, and steel, and saucepans, and all the tools by which its food was made. And also clothes, and fashions and ideas and interesting vices, songs and knowledge and something which, if looked at in the right light, was called civilization. That's what civilization *meant*. It meant the city.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ Terry Pratchett, *Night Watch* (London: Doubleday, 2002), 299.

Rather than a project to reclaim the city--which in Europe was much older, and not subject to American-style decay or contrasted with an American-style frontier--the Discworld series has become Pratchett's forum for using fantasy to critique his own culture, and arguably to challenge European notions of national essentialism by forcing disparate kinds of fantasy races to occupy the same urban space and work together to solve problems. *Night Watch* (2002), for example, deals principally with policing, and especially with the ethical questions contained within, when Sam Vimes, a high-ranking Watchman (the city's equivalent of a police officer), finds himself travelling back in time to the night of a citizens' uprising against a corrupt and paranoid leader who invests his enforcers with the authority to torture suspects, and is answerable to no one but himself. Given the publication date, it is difficult to avoid seeing this as a commentary on post-9/11 policing tactics. Vimes, who prides himself on being a good Watchman, finds himself part of the rebellion, and the criminal he was chasing part of the power structures of the city, and reflects:

Who knew what evil lurked in the hearts of men? A copper, that's who. After ten years you thought you'd seen it all, but the shadows always dished up more. You saw how close men lived to the beast. You realized that people like Carcer were not mad. They were incredibly sane. They were simply men without a shield. They'd looked at the world and realized that all the rules didn't have to apply to them, not if they didn't want them to. They weren't fooled by all the little stories. They shook hands with the beast.

[...] The world was spinning. Where *was* the law? There was the barricade. Who was it protecting from what? The city was run by a madman and his shadowy chums so *where was the law?*

Coppers liked to say that people shouldn't take the law into their own hands, and they thought they knew what they meant. They were thinking about the normal times, and men who went round to sort out a neighbour with a club because his dog had cr****d once too often on their doorstep. But at times like *this*, who did the law belong to? If it shouldn't be in the hands of people, where the hell *should* it be? People who knew better? Then you got Winder and his pals, and how good was that?

What was supposed to happen next? Oh yes, he had a badge, but it wasn't *his*, not really...and he'd got orders, and they were the wrong ones...and he'd got enemies, for all the wrong reasons...and maybe there was *no future*. It didn't exist any more. There was nothing real, no solid point on which to stand, just Sam Vimes where he had no right to be...³⁵⁹

Good and evil are not inherent traits here, but dependent on a system that can, itself, be corrupted.

Megan Lindholm's *The Wizard of the Pigeons* (1986), another iconic text in early urban fantasy, is the story of Wizard, a Vietnam veteran, who acts as an oracle for the people of Seattle. His fellow homeless people are a community of wizards, and the strange behaviours, chanting, superstitions, and prohibitions generally assumed to be symptoms of

³⁵⁹ Ibid. 231.

untreated mental illness are actually observances of the rules that govern each wizard's powers.

Lindholm goes out of her way to begin the book using the language and tone of fairy tale and high fantasy:

On the far western shore of a northern continent there was once a harbor city called Seattle. It did not have much of a reputation for sunshine and beaches, but it did have plenty of rain, and the folk who lived there were wont to call it 'The Emerald City' for the greenness of its foliage. And the other thing it boasted was a great friendliness that fell upon strangers like its rain, but with more warmth. In that city, there dwelt a wizard.

[...]

Little was known of his past, but atoning for this lack was a plenitude of rumours about it. Some said he had been an engineer and a warrior who had returned from some far battle with memories too fearsome to tolerate. And some said no, that he had been a scholar and among those who had refused to go to that far strife, and that was why he dwelt nameless and homeless in the streets. And some said he was older than the city itself, and others that he was newly arrived, only a day or so ago. But what folk said of him mattered little, because it was what he did that was important.³⁶⁰

³⁶⁰ Megan Lindholm, *The Wizard of the Pigeons* (New York: Ace Books, 1986), 9.

The framing itself accomplishes the juxtaposition. Attebery notes, “Lindholm has constructed a narrative that says, by its very shape, that telling magical tales may be a way of taking control of an otherwise unmanageable reality.”³⁶¹

Mendlesohn identifies *The Wizard of the Pigeons* (and the aforementioned *Little, Big*) as liminal fantasy: it is never clear, to the characters or the reader, whether the magic is happening. Indeed, the principal conflict in the novel is one of framing. The antagonist, Mir, threatens to reduce the protagonist from a powerful wizard surrounded and sustained by magic to a homeless Vietnam veteran who needs to take his medication on time. Mir itself is either a faceless evil that fights Wizard by compelling him to relive his worst memories, or Wizard’s mundane identity, Mitchell Ignatius Reilly. The choice that Lindholm presents to the characters and the reader is in many ways central to urban fantasy of the 1980s: infuse the city with magic, or abandon it to urban decay.

In *The Wizard of the Pigeons*, Mir is both elemental evil, and a frame that reinforces the reader’s own (presumably) customary way of seeing things: it is ungraspable and virtually undescribed, and yet utterly familiar. Like the menacing shadow in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the threat is an aspect of the protagonist’s self. It is tempting, polluting, palpable, disembodied, and if it does not threaten to dehumanize Wizard, it threatens to take away his identity along with his magic. The book raises the possibility that even elemental evil is contextual, and that there are times, for the individual, when framing a personal struggle as a heroic battle between good and evil may be empowering.

Somewhat akin to Lindholm’s book is Peter S. Beagle’s *The Folk of the Air* (1986), which similarly features magic lurking under cover of eccentricity--this time in the League

³⁶¹ Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* 137.

for Archaic Pleasures, a club that stages medieval reenactments--albeit through the eyes of a skeptical narrator. Joe Farrell, a lute-player who has just returned to San Francisco to visit an old friend, discovers first that the friend is living with a woman who is actually an ancient goddess; secondly that while he is unable to immerse himself in the League as his friends do, his lute-playing is appreciated there, on terms that mesh with his own ideas about nostalgia and aestheticism; and finally, that the teenaged girl who plays at being a witch in the League really is one, and has just conjured an ancient evil.

Nicholas Bonner, the evil in question, is the first glimpse of anything like traditional elemental evil in urban fantasy, but his ability to do harm is sharply limited. He relies on the girl, Aiffe, as a source of power and ideas, even as he treats her badly. Aiffe herself is spoiled, malicious, and power-hungry, but this is depicted as the natural condition of every teenaged girl, a sentiment that will be echoed in some of Lackey's urban fantasy, to be discussed in Chapter 6. The trouble is not that Aiffe is what she is, but that she has power to act on her immature impulses, and is willing to endure a certain amount of verbal abuse and humiliation to keep what she has. This makes Aiffe dangerous, certainly, but she is also a figure of pity. Much of later urban fantasy, in which the presence of magic in the city constitutes movement towards renewal and hope for the future, is, if not geared towards teens, at least sympathetic to them. *The Folk of the Air*, however, makes its teen characters³⁶² wild, dangerous, and disrespectful, poor inheritors of the world compared to the flower children, Farrell's generation, who go so far to preserve the past that they are willing to immerse themselves in it.

³⁶² Not only Aiffe but Pierce/Harlow, the fresh-faced, clean-cut young hitchhiker who carjacks Farrell for thrills.

Emma Bull's 1987 novel *The War for the Oaks* follows a pattern that recurs several times in urban fantasy, including several of the fantasies discussed in the current study. It tells the story of Eddi McCandry, a Minneapolis rock musician who is forcibly recruited by the fae of Seelie Court to aid them in a battle against the Unseelie Court. The fae are normally immortal, but her presence would render all the wounds "true ones, and some would be fatal."³⁶³ Although she is drafted against her will, and the phouka sent to guard her does so in a way that violates her privacy and prevents her from living a normal life, every outrage he commits precedes something much worse from which he protects her, and she eventually aligns herself with the Seelie cause and falls in love with her protector. In human form, the phouka is a Black man, which arguably draws on the trope of the Magical Negro, and is doubly problematic considering that he is framed as an unwanted and occasionally threatening intruder for the first third of the novel.

Evil here comes in the form of the Unseelie Court, led by the Queen of Air and Darkness. The phouka warns Eddi of what will happen to the city if they gain control:

There are places [...] that belong to them. Have you ever passed through some small town, surrounded by fertile country and fed by commerce, that seemed to be rotting away even as you watched? Where the houses and the people were faded, and all the storefronts stood empty? [...] Or a city whose new buildings looked tawdry, whose old ones were ramshackle, where the streets were grimy and the wind was never fresh, where money passed from hand to hand to hand yet benefitted no one?

³⁶³ Emma Bull, *War for the Oaks* (New York: Ace Books, 1987), 21.

[...] This city is alive with the best magic of mortal folk. The very light off the skyscrapers and the lakes vibrates with it. If the Unseelie Court takes up residence here, this will be a place where people fear their neighbors, where life drains the living until art and wit are luxuries, where any pleasant thing must be imported and soon loses its savor.³⁶⁴

Evil here is represented as urban decay, a trope that echoes the polluting quality of Tolkienesque evil. But the Seelie/Unseelie divide is first expressed not in terms of good and evil, but of class:

‘We are of the Seelie Court, noblest blood of Faerie,’ the glaistig continued. ‘We are the guardians, the rulers’--here the phouka snorted--‘and to us are reserved the sacred grounds of hill and spring, the magical herbs and trees.’

‘But of course,’ the phouka broke in, ‘where there are those who think themselves noble folk, there must be some poor sod to play the commoner... [...] And in our case, we have the Unseelie Court, the most sodden lot you’re like to see.’³⁶⁵

The phouka, however, also reveals another divide--that between the Sidhe, who have a “habit of rule”³⁶⁶ but are out of touch with those they govern, and the other Folk who serve under them. He argues--and perhaps the above exchange with the glaistig confirms--that

³⁶⁴ Ibid. 59-60. This bears a striking resemblance to Mercedes Lackey’s description of a city without any fairies at all, as I will show in Chapter 6.

³⁶⁵ Ibid. 20.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. 174.

the Seelie Court Sidhe are so class-obsessed that they would rather find behavioural models in their Unseelie Court counterparts than in the people they govern. His goal in choosing Eddi for the Seelie Court's purpose was to find a neutral, non-Sidhe third person around whom members of the Seelie Court would rally.³⁶⁷ This is a neat way of negotiating between the representation of a traditional Faerie court and the discomfort with monarchy, in a way that still gives the monarchy a measure of moral high ground without endorsing the structure itself.

Although Charles de Lint laid the groundwork in *Moonheart*, Bull's book arguably marks the solidification of urban fantasy into a genre with its own conventions. Here again are the precariously employed female protagonist, the otherworldly love interest, and the importance of music. Here also is the theme of fairies having migrated to North America. Many North American urban fantasy texts consider the problem of colonization through a magical lens, albeit often in ways that downplay or erase the cultures that existed here before.

War for the Oaks is one of the texts Farah Mendlesohn has used to argue that urban fantasy carries with it uncomfortable associations with rape and colonialism³⁶⁸--that it smacks of "rescuing the natives from themselves."³⁶⁹ The phouka's invasion of her life on the pretext of necessity bears out the former, and the idea that a human can solve the problems of the Sidhe by virtue of being an outsider--as well as other small moments in the text, such as Eddi's lecture to a brownie on the value of life³⁷⁰--reinforce the latter. I

³⁶⁷ Ibid. 174-175.

³⁶⁸ Mendlesohn 181.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. 148.

³⁷⁰ Bull 279.

disagree with Mendlesohn's extension of this assessment to the genre in its entirety, but in the case of this particular text, her argument is persuasive.

Urban fantasy solidified as a genre in the nineteen-nineties. The genre seems to have gained a greater awareness of multiculturalism as an aspect of urban life at that point. Authors and protagonists are still overwhelmingly white, but there is an effort to represent non-white people--particularly Indigenous people and Black people--and parallels are drawn between magical citizens and marginalized communities.

Neil Gaiman, writer of the *Sandman* series of graphic novels, turned his hand to prose fiction after *Sandman* ended. *Neverwhere*, published in 1996, was his first solo novel (he had previously written *Good Omens* with Terry Pratchett). In it a young professional stops to help a young woman, Door, who has collapsed on a London street, and catches a glimpse of London Below, a fantastic community made up of the discarded bits of London Above and infused with a good deal of magic. After they part, he discovers that he has somehow been erased from his own life, forgotten by all who knew him, and he has no choice but to find Door and join her quest to find out who murdered her family.

The idea of the fantastic city separate from, and seething underneath, the mundane city, is a staple of horror fiction: ordinary people inhabit the city blissfully unaware of the criminal conspiracies of Fu Manchu, or the unholy rites that honour Satan or Cthulhu or Gozer the Destructor; if they knew, they would flee to the simplicity and wholesomeness of the country. The trope makes a brief appearance in the aforementioned *Our Lady of Darkness*. Gaiman introduces the idea that it is awareness that is more blissful; that if one knew the truth, one would be awed and delighted--and perhaps more compassionate, as one cannot see London Below without also seeing the people rejected by London Above.

In *Neverwhere*, one source of antagonism is Croup and Vandemar, a pair of hired mercenaries who wear humanity like an ill-fitting suit; it is possible to laugh at the splitting seams, even as the reader shudders at what is underneath. Croup and Vandemar are thoroughly and uncannily bad, but they are a very long way from the sublime elemental evil of Sauron. Their employer, however, and the engineer of the murder of Door's family, is not a ruffian but an angel: Islington, who was banished from heaven. Unfailingly polite and apologetic, Islington has Croup and Vandemar torture and kill for him, even as he shakes his head in sorrow.³⁷¹ As Croup puts it, "Can't make an omelette without killing a few people."³⁷²

American Gods, although it was published in 2001, features antagonism from a similar source--in this case, the protagonist's employer, Mr. Wednesday. It becomes obvious early on that Mr. Wednesday is Odin himself. What is revealed at the end is that Odin, in league with Loki, has planned to set the old gods who came to America with immigrants fighting the new gods--shallow, crass, consumerist gods born of American culture and acting more like badly behaved billionaires than like deities--so that they can feast on the battle.³⁷³ Odin feeds on death, and Loki on chaos, and a slaughter of gods will constitute a wonderful sacrifice--another case of formerly powerful entities causing harm and wreaking havoc in an effort to recapture their glory. In Gaiman's work, the greatest threat comes from thwarted privilege, and it is so insidious precisely because it works so well with the systems of the world and looks so very reasonable. To apply the criteria derived from Tolkien, its reasonableness makes it tempting, but only upon further analysis

³⁷¹ Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere* (New York: Avon, 1997), 289.

³⁷² Ibid. 289.

³⁷³ Neil Gaiman, *American Gods* (New York: W. Morrow, 2001), 415.

is it dehumanizing, in its casual erasure of the marginalized. It is not palpable or viciously competitive; it does not need to be. And although it does rely on an already corrupt system, it is not polluting. The moral landscape of Gaiman's work is more sophisticated, and marrying wrong in his work to Tolkien's criteria requires a more sophisticated argument.

Josepha Sherman's 1998 novel *Son of Darkness* is a relatively minor entry in the field, but it is worthy of mention for two reasons. First of all, although it follows the *War for the Oaks* pattern of a human woman and a fae man pairing up to battle a magical threat, the elf in question is a dark elf. Ilaron Highborn has fled his Mordor-like realm and now lives in New York, hiding from his own people. Ilaron's people come looking for him at the same time that a cult raises Lamashtu, the Akkadian goddess of disease, who strikes a deal with Kerezar, the king of the dark elves. Ilaron and his human friend, museum curator Denise Sheridan, must find a way to banish both of them. Although Ilaron must periodically kill--whether he does it to appease an inner compulsion, or whether it is actual a matter of survival for him, is unclear--he searches for those who deserve it:

No. No! 'No!' he shouted.

Then he resumed his restless pacing, fighting the Darkness, fighting himself, fighting every instinct tearing at him, fighting--

Ilaron stopped short, throwing back his head in despair as the full force of Darkness tore free beyond all suppressing, screaming to him of what he had been, of what he was, screaming to him of the night, the night all around him.

Not again, no, not again! I will not!

But the night was calling, the night, the darkness, the hunt, the hunt, the hunt...

At last, with a strangled cry, Ilaron could no longer resist. [...] There must be a hunt, there must be a hunt--

But it will not be sworn to Darkness. Once again, it will not be sworn to Darkness!

[...] No one saw the dark figure prowling the night, a shadow amid the shadows, alone amid the crowds, unnoticed by humanity. He saw prospective victim after victim, but told himself fiercely, *no!* He would *not* harm the innocent, he would *not* slay those of the Light. Even though the Darkness burned at him until he could barely think, he held fast to this one resolution:

*I offer no further sacrifices to the Dark!*³⁷⁴

This is something that will appear in other urban fantasies, particularly those involving vampires: nonhuman people whose prey is humans develop an ethics of consumption.

Secondly, *Son of Darkness* stands out in part because between the dark elves and Lamashtu, the evil in it strikes every note from the Lord of the Rings trilogy: Ilaron is tempted by Darkness; Lamashtu spreads pollution in the form of an Ebola-like disease; Denise and Ilaron can feel Lamashtu's evil; Lamashtu and Kerezar are ostensibly working together but betray each other; Kerezar uses human beings as slaves, fuel, and augury tools; and Lamashtu is disembodied, hopping from host to host. Lamashtu even shares some of Melkor's origin story, having been created for the Light but freely choosing

³⁷⁴ Josepha Sherman, *Son of Darkness* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 31-32.

Darkness.³⁷⁵ And yet, New York goes largely unharmed. Innocent people die, but not a large number of them, and the normal workings of the city are not interrupted. And where talk of Light and Darkness is compelling in Middle-earth or Fionavar or even Malloreia, Ilaron's invocation of them seems quaint and a little ridiculous. When elemental evil enters the city, it becomes just one more citizen.

After 9/11 and the corresponding rise in popular discourse concerning evil, some urban fantasy authors, both American, and as we have seen, British, reacted to racism and polarizing discourse with a more careful examination of conflict with the other and the implications of their narrative choices. Terry Pratchett and even Mercedes Lackey used their established worlds to examine the implications of post-9/11 anti-terrorism legislation, and the politics behind branding a person as a terrorist. Others, such as Wen Spencer, apparently saw narrative opportunities in the idea of a world polarized between East and West.

Where links had previously been drawn between magical people and marginalized people, in the 2000s it is possible to see authors experimenting with the idea that magical people need not be dependent on the mundane world; that they would have their own cultures and customs and systems; and that in an encounter with them, even humans who occupy dominant roles in Western culture would be at a cultural disadvantage.

The Green and the Gray is a 2002 novel by Timothy Zahn, who is better known for his science fiction. The Greens and the Grays are ancient enemies, humanoid--but not human--beings who fled a war and settled in New York City. Humans Roger and Caroline stumble into their conflict, and after thorough investigation, Roger tells them:

³⁷⁵ Ibid. 243.

[T]here never was anything [to fight about]. Most of the Grays in New York weren't even born when you escaped from the war, and the rest were only children. You can't ask them to pay for the mistakes of your parents any more than they can demand that kind of payment from you. You can put that all behind you and start again.³⁷⁶

With the help of the Greens and the Greys who will cooperate, Roger and Caroline declare peace, and the two sides abide by it.

This narrative illustrates Farah Mendlesohn's assertion that urban fantasy has colonial tendencies: two humans turn up and solve a millennia-old conflict by finding out the truth that no one else bothered to, and talking to everyone nicely. But it is worth noting that the novel is from 2002, and was likely a response to 9/11 and the myriad assertions, in its wake, that the Western world and the Islamic world were simply too different to share a planet. Both the Greens and the Grays have legitimate grievances and good arguments for their positions, and a substantial portion of the book is consumed by one side or the other furnishing context for their actions that persuades Roger and Caroline that *they* were right. Zahn's book reads as a problematic but well-intentioned attempt to think about 9/11, and plead for peace, in non-polarizing terms.

John M. Ford's *The Last Hot Time* (2000) is one of two novels examined here that merge fantasy and science fiction, positing that Faerie is another dimension. Previously, Terri Windling's *Borderlands* series had done something similar, with different authors

³⁷⁶ Timothy Zahn, *The Green and the Gray* (New York: Tor Books, 2004), 433.

setting short stories and a handful of novels in Bordertown, an unnamed American city that shares a newly created border with Faerie. The area of Bordertown in which the stories are set no longer functions as a technologically advanced urban centre dominated by global trade; it rather becomes a sort of urban fantastic utopia enlivened by small businesses, the arts, and close-knit communities of affinity, with just enough danger to lend spice to life.

Ford's novel and Wen Spencer's *Tinker* (2004) share with the Borderlands series the premise that Faerie, long separated from Earth, has recently become accessible again, and is encroaching on a North American city. The newer novels, however, seem to share greater focus on the imaginative exploration of two things: how technology would interface with magic³⁷⁷; and how humans would navigate the power structures of Faerie, and what would best be described as Elven privilege. Where in the Borderlands series is "set in a derelict part of the city entirely taken over by kids, a place where adults rarely step foot"³⁷⁸, Ford and Spencer depict adult human characters trying to work closely with Elves and function in settings where unfamiliar protocols apply, and are reinforced by magic. It is possible to read these as an attempt to look at Elves from a postcolonial perspective, where the Elves are the colonial power and humans--American humans, many of whom are white and accustomed to privilege in their own culture--learn what it is like to be treated as inferior and set at sea among strange language and customs, with the other party enjoying access to power that the humans do not. Spencer's novel undermines this interpretation, however.

³⁷⁷ Terri Windling points out that our relationship with technology has changed drastically since the series began in 1985, and the 2011 Bordertown anthology *Welcome to Bordertown* reflects those changes (Meisner, interview).

³⁷⁸ Terri Windling, interview with Karen Meisner, "Running Away to Bordertown: An Interview with Holly Black, Ellen Kushner, and Terri Windling," *Strange Horizons*, 13 June 2011, 13 June 2013 <strangehorizons.com/2011/20110613/0bordertown-a.shtml>.

In *The Last Hot Time*, the city of Chicago has become a border town ruled by warring gangs, at least one of which, paradoxically, is interested in keeping drugs off the streets, keeping order, and seeing justice done. Young paramedic Danny Holman is recruited by this gang, and finds himself going after an elven--Ellyllon--drug lord, Whisper Who Dares the Word of Words in Darkness, who sells elf blood to addicted humans. *The Last Hot Time* is notable not only for the small scale of the conflict--after the final battle, a character tells Danny, "As far as I know, Whisper Who Dares didn't have some kind of supervillain doomsday plot that needed derailing just as it counted down to zero"³⁷⁹--but, as with a number of other novels examined in this chapter, for its exploration of the relationship between power and morality when social structures are weakened. Mr. Patrise, the gang leader and Danny's employer, helps the police maintain law and order, but uses his own version of blood sacrifice against Whisper Who Dares. When Danny protests that Mr. Patrise's use of blood is different, Mr. Patrise agrees, but wonders aloud if Danny sees the *right* difference.³⁸⁰ Danny himself worries about his own moral status, and although the novel never wavers in its depiction of him as unambiguously good, it also emphasizes that he and the rest of the gang are poised on a razor edge--that doing the right thing is not a matter of identity or allegiance, but a constant decision-making process that is occasionally very difficult.

Wen Spencer's *Tinker*, which operates with a much simpler moral scheme, is a hybrid novel, combining the fantasy of elves with the science fiction of an interdimensional gate and strong overtones of paranormal romance. Alexander Graham "Tinker" Bell is an eighteen-year-old genius who lives in the near-future city of Pittsburgh, which spends all

³⁷⁹ John Ford, *The Last Hot Time* (New York: Tor Books, 2000), 199.

³⁸⁰ Ibid. 174.

but one day a month in another dimension, on the planet of Elfhome. Tinker's father is the inventor of the interdimensional gate, but the plans were stolen by the Chinese, and someone has been murdering any scientist who comes close to advancing gate technologies.

When Tinker saves an elven viceroy, Windwolf, from a pack of Chinese foo lions, Windwolf develops a liking for her, in odd and disturbing ways. First he kidnaps her, takes her to an elven hospice, and drugs her in order to get appropriate medical attention for a lion bite.³⁸¹ Then he offers her a bowl, and when she accepts, gives her a magical forehead tattoo³⁸² that, it transpires, means they are married.³⁸³ He magically tracks her while she is on a date with another man.³⁸⁴ Finally, telling her that he is saving her from death, he transforms her into an elf.³⁸⁵ In the latter two cases, he does seek her consent, after a fashion, but does not tell her the implications of that consent. In short, a large part of the book consists of a strong female character being overpowered and violated, in various ways, by the man who will become her husband.

It transpires that the creatures trying to kill Windwolf are oni--Japanese fairies. The Chinese people thought to be involved in stealing, building, and maintaining the interdimensional gate are actually oni.³⁸⁶ Another elf tells her that oni "are cruel and ruthless people with no sense of honor. Their weapons are crude, for they are a younger race than either elves or humans, but they spawn like mice and would crush us with sheer

³⁸¹ Wen Spencer, *Tinker* (Riverdale NY: Baen, 2003), 53-57.

³⁸² Ibid. 91.

³⁸³ Ibid. 195-196.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. 151.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. 161.

³⁸⁶ Ibid. 308.

numbers.”³⁸⁷ Of their discovery of the location of Earth, he adds, “What’s more, they had discovered the secrets of self-healing and immortality, yet continued to breed like mice. With their numbers and abilities, they would have flooded Earth unchecked.”³⁸⁸ Like the Murgos in the *Belgariad*, the oni are described in terms that evoke “Yellow Peril” narratives: cruel, primitive, and poised to overwhelm Earth with their numbers. To drive the likeness home, twice Spencer describes the appearance of an oni palace as “Oriental.”³⁸⁹ Evil, in *Tinker*, is based in biology, and unfortunately, ethnicity. Ford’s book appears before 9/11, and *Tinker* appears after it, but to claim that the differences are entirely attributable to this would be reductive.

Taken together, however, Ford’s and Spencer’s books make an interesting change in the representation of Elves on our world, taking them from marginalized people living in the interstices of human culture to a dominant population whose constituents have a range of relationships with and responses to humans.

Susanna Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, published in 2004, combines alternate history, urban fantasy, and the comedy of manners. It is set in the Napoleonic era of an England that was once ruled by John Uskglass, Newcastle’s sorcerous Raven King. In this enlightened era practical magic is no longer done, but the titular magicians set out to revive it.

One of the principal antagonists in the novel is the gentleman with thistle-down hair, a fae man whom Norrell has summoned and unwittingly affronted, and who continues to regard everything the magicians do as a grave and calculated insult. Although he has a

³⁸⁷ Ibid. 189.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. 191.

³⁸⁹ Ibid. 266-267.

penchant for kidnapping mortals to populate his bleak and cheerless kingdom, his actions do not partake of elemental evil. Indeed, his harassment of Stephen Black, a butler born to slaves, is well-intentioned: the gentleman with thistle-down hair sees Stephen's competence, leadership abilities, and regal bearing; becomes enraged at the injustice of his parents' slavery, their deaths, and his subsequent escape into the service of Walter Pole; and decides to make him into a king. If the man with the thistle-down hair is callous, bullying, paternalistic, and so fond of his own way of doing things that he regards any disagreement as a sign of malice and perversity, then he is no more so than the human antagonists Lascelles and Drawlight, or for that matter, Mr. Norrell himself; the difference appears to be largely that the reader is expected to be familiar with the various English values that Norrell, Lascelles, and Drawlight appeal to. Indeed, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* appears to be a study in the dangers of ostensibly beneficent but culturally chauvinistic actions that ignore the needs and perspectives of others.

For some years now, the urban fantasy field, particularly in America, has been dominated by series that focus on the serial adventures of characters who either are, or are romantically entangled with, supernatural beings of some sort. Examples of these include Laurell K. Hamilton's Anita Blake series (1993-present), Patricia Briggs' Mercy Thompson books (2006-present), Stephenie Meyers' Twilight Saga (2005-2008), Liz Williams' Detective Inspector Chen novels (2005-2015), and Jim Butcher's Dresden Files (2000-2014). On the one hand, these books take the subjects of horror novels and make them protagonists, love interests, and friends--in short, they explore the possibility of familiarity, even love, with groups previously thought to be essentially evil. On the other hand, in

doing so they displace what was previously characterized as interspecies conflict in often problematic ways.

Arguably, the first example of this novel is Anne Rice's *Interview With the Vampire*, from 1975, although it was not considered part of urban fantasy until the turn of the century. The Anita Blake: Vampire Killer series is an early entry, with the first book published in 1993. The subgenre gathered steam coincident with the popularity of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and its various spinoffs and imitators. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as the characters spend more time with vampires, the undead gradually become less threatening, sexier, and more morally ambiguous. Likewise, in the books that comprise the supernatural romance subgenre of urban fantasy, the question of what evil is proves to be more complicated than it initially appears.

The books are overwhelmingly aimed at women and girls, and all but two of the named examples have female protagonists. Unlike the tangleheaded waifs of earlier urban fantasy, these characters tend to be simultaneously more stereotypically feminine in their dress and behaviour, and physically stronger, more capable, and more violent.³⁹⁰ Often either formally or informally employed to police supernatural people, they become increasingly embroiled in supernatural social structures, and often rise to the top of them, not by being in the right place at the right time like a Jackie Rowan or Eddi McCandry but by defeating "alpha males" in physical or magical battles. This indicates that the--again,

³⁹⁰ A notable exception is Bella Swan, of the *Twilight* Saga, who is hyperfeminine, and whose only abilities are angst and motherhood until she becomes a vampire herself.

overwhelmingly female--authors are engaging with gender binaries in ways that might merit a study of their own.³⁹¹

Even more interestingly, both Mercy Thompson and Anita Blake identify as Christians, even as they work closely with vampires and wield occult power. This may be construed as an attempt to appeal to an audience that identifies as Christian, that may have been alienated by previous urban fantasy that placed more emphasis on nonChristian or preChristian religious traditions; it may also constitute an argument that there is nothing specifically anti-Christian about the subject matter--be it vampires, werewolves, sex, or strong female characters. It may also be one of the ways of redrawing of the boundaries between creatures traditionally considered evil and the rest of the world.

For example, in Patricia Briggs' *Blood Bound*, Mercy Thompson muses:

I'm afraid of evil.

In our modern world, even the word seems...old-fashioned. When it comes out of hiding briefly in a Charles Manson or a Jeffrey Dahmer, we try to explain it away with drug abuse, an unhappy childhood, or mental illness.

[...]

The devout belief that the world is explainable is both a terrible vulnerability and a stout shield. Evil prefers it when people don't believe.³⁹²

³⁹¹ One of the tasks of such a study might be to find readership figures for fantasy, which I and the library researchers I asked have been unable to do.

³⁹² Patricia Briggs, *Blood Bound* (New York: Berkeley, 2007), 3.

Shortly after this, her friend Stefan turns up at her door to call in a favour, and she reflects that vampires are evil.³⁹³ Stefan is friendly and nonthreatening, and he does nothing in the novel that could be construed as evil, but Mercy confidently places him in the same category as Charles Manson and Jeffrey Dahmer, even as she identifies him as a friend, suggesting that evil, to Briggs, is a more complex issue than she allows Mercy to acknowledge.

Paradoxically, very often these books deal with magical crime, and the hunting of magical criminals. This imparts to these books a more conservative nature, perhaps as a reflection of the conservative strain in American politics. In this scheme, harm is the work of an aberrant individual or group of individuals. This precludes the portrayal of Tolkienesque evil, but depicts a world in which getting tough on crime and getting tough on evil are the same thing, and are accomplished in much the same ways. Moreover, often despite the presence of law-abiding members of the same species, the threat these individuals pose is often a matter of biology--of literal race. Humans are unaware of the danger posed by creatures who look human but are not; whose biological needs and social structures are antithetical to the well-being of humans.

The battles fought in this kind of urban fantasy are largely covert, solitary, and physical, a sort of urban sword and sorcery. For those who enjoy reading about this kind of action, it is difficult to imagine another framework that does not involve crime (although China Miéville makes a very good attempt in *Kraken*, which relegates crime to the periphery); systemic injustice is notoriously impervious to kung fu.

³⁹³ Ibid. 4.

These books may work to articulate fears about immigrants, multiculturalism, and crime. However, it is also possible that their popularity is driven not by the nature of their villains, but by the nature of their heroism. It is only relatively recently that female protagonists who can physically overpower men have become widely acceptable in fantasy.³⁹⁴ Moreover, books that solve problems with solitary physical action, particularly the firing of weapons and the use of magic, arguably bear a narrative resemblance to first-person shooter video games. In this case, their xenophobic implications might not be a reason for their existence, but a side effect of it.

One series that complicates this scheme is Charlaine Harris' Sookie Stackhouse series, which draws parallels between vampires and LGBT people (parallels that are in turn intensified by *True Blood*, the HBO series based on the books), and vampires and people of colour. *Dead Until Dark*, the first book in the series, acknowledges that vampires can be dangerous, but raises the possibility that at least some of their anti-human behaviour and rigid social structures are a response to human fear and prejudice. Vampires drink the blood of humans, although it is the invention of synthetic blood that allows them to come "out of the coffin" as the book puts it. However, there are also predatory humans who drain vampire blood and sell it as a drug. Only one species, however, is blamed for draining and drinking blood.

Sookie's love interest, Bill Compton, makes an effort to fit in among humans, but the people in their small town view him with suspicion, disapprove of human-vampire relationships, and blame him for a series of murders. Even Sookie occasionally has trouble

³⁹⁴ Even sword-and-sorcery heroine Frost derived her power from her swordswomanship, rather than physical strength.

seeing Bill's actions and attitudes as his own, and not representative of the actions and attitudes of all vampires.

As I have noted, Farah Mendlesohn suggests that much of urban fantasy--which she calls, borrowing the term from Attebery, "indigenous fantasy"³⁹⁵--is essentially colonial:

The form's political stance repudiates responsibility while positing the importance of the protagonist. It is tied up in a dance of intimacy and repulsion, in which we do not always know who is the ravisher and who the ravished. That very lack of clarity creates a mask for an often vicious colonialist attitude to the Other.³⁹⁶

This pattern, and sometimes the accompanying "vicious colonialist attitude," are arguably present in *The War for the Oaks*, *The Green and the Gray*, *Son of Darkness*, *Tinker*, and *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows*, which is covered in Chapter 6.³⁹⁷

Treating the intrusion with wonder rather than horror requires the protagonist to accept the intrusion, and the crux of Mendlesohn's argument appears to be that the very structure of urban fantasy is designed to remove the protagonist's ability to refuse. Mendlesohn says that one of the characteristics of these novels is "the sense of the opening chasm between the protagonist and his social circle."³⁹⁸ Taken in conjunction with Mendlesohn's criticisms of the forced intimacy of the intrusion fantasy, there is an

³⁹⁵ Mendlesohn 147. Use of the term "indigenous" is a problem here, in that while North American fantasy is home-grown, "indigenous" evokes First Nations and Inuit populations, who are, arguably, not particularly well served by "indigenous" fantasy.

³⁹⁶ Ibid. 181.

³⁹⁷ Mendlesohn also uses the example of Charles de Lint's *Jack of Kinrowan*, which is not included in this study, and Holly Black's *Tithe* makes use of it as well.

³⁹⁸ Mendlesohn 128.

uncomfortable connotation of isolation by an abuser, the “domineering boyfriend who tells [one] to understand the world his/its way.”³⁹⁹ I contend, however, that in urban fantasy (as opposed to horror, the other genre that is home to many Intrusion fantasies) the action is not one of separation and closing off, but of opening out and connecting. Even if the world being connected to is a hidden one, it is inevitably wider, stranger, and more accommodating of difference; and it in turn is often linked to the well-being of the mundane world. It is possible to regard the forced intimacy of the intrusion fantasy as a violation, but where possible, I prefer to interpret it in terms of what Wendy Doniger calls the microscope and the telescope. Doniger cites examples, from myth, of characters’ problems or complaints being answered with the imposition of what she calls a telescopic view of the universe, a grand view of the big picture and the interconnectedness of all things. Although these visions are unasked for, they are not violations, but revelations. Urban fantasy imposes its own vision of interconnectedness by making tenuous threads more tangible in the form of magic.

Although Mendlesohn also uses the quite recent *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* as an example of the form subverted, the texts she lists as straightforward examples are early urban fantasies, both from 1987, and most of those that I have acknowledged are problematic are early ones as well. Over the course of the genre’s development, authors have quite consciously taken more care with representation and the political implications of their work.

Moreover, fantasy allows the testing ideas about those who, for whatever reason, are designated as other. This does very little good if the other is absolutely other by

³⁹⁹ Ibid. 151.

definition; unmitigated hatred is both repellent and boring. But in exploring the personhood of magical beings, it is not unusual for authors to start off with one (well-intentioned) stance and gradually adjust it to account for shifts in understanding. In the works I have examined already, these shifts have been most visible in the high fantasies, where the author often must correct his or her construction of the world--such as the Earthsea books, in which Le Guin realizes that the fate of the dead in *The Farthest Shore* is not consistent with her own beliefs; or the Harry Potter books, in which Rowling finally gives the readers Professor Slughorn, a sympathetic Slytherin. Doing this work in the fictional world means that it can be done largely without impacting real people, and it models the process for readers. These shifts are easier to see in the context of a series, while in this chapter I have focused primarily on single, stand-alone urban fantasies. The ensuing chapters will, among other things, shed more light on these shifts.

Chapter 5: “I believe we’re all here to look out for each other, even when the other’s a person like you”: Charles de Lint

Dutch-born Canadian author Charles de Lint’s career spans from the very beginnings of urban fantasy to the present day. Evil, in de Lint’s books, is always a human construct, and antagonistic characters have plausible motivations. These motivations have grown more complex over the course of de Lint’s career, but they can be traced to the rejection of, perversion of, or disregard for proper connections--with human beings, with other kinds of people, with nature, and with the past. Healthy connections are both a preventative and an antidote to wrongdoing, harm, and past trauma. Moreover, de Lint explores characters to which mythical evil is often attributed--the shadow self, the out-of-control creation, the race of predators--and, in these explorations, either complicates or entirely negates any links one might make to moral evil.

Context and Reception

De Lint is one of the pioneers of urban fantasy. He is one of two Canadian authors to be treated in the ensuing chapters.

Robert Runte finds a consensus among recent critics that Canadian science fiction is more concerned with average protagonists, environmental concerns, and ambiguous

endings.⁴⁰⁰ Moreover, Canadian fantastic literature tends to be more literary⁴⁰¹, and more fantasy is written than science fiction, a tendency that Runte attributes in part to a multiculturalism interested in preserving distinct pasts, and in part to less faith in technological solutions to problems.⁴⁰² Although Runte's primary concern is science fiction, some of the features that he identifies are transferable to fantasy as well. In particular, he finds that many features of Canadian fantastic literature to a reaction to American fantastic literature's interventionism and triumphalism. This is useful to keep in mind in the work of both de Lint and Armstrong.

De Lint himself argues for the category "North American magical realism" instead of "urban fantasy," claiming that "the term contemporary fantasy can mean many things to many people. It can describe a book of mythic depth and resonance[...], as well as any number of slighter novels that are simply standard high fantasy stories disguised in contemporary urban trappings."⁴⁰³ This terminology is not appropriate, as magical realism was developed in very specific political and geographical circumstances that do not obtain for white North American writers, but by seeking to adopt it, De Lint attempts to position himself in a number of ways. First of all, it sets his work off from high fantasy and sword and sorcery. Secondly, it sets his work off from European fantasy. Finally, it does so by

⁴⁰⁰ Robert Runte, "Why I Read Canadian Speculative Fiction: The Social Dimension of Reading," *The Canadian Fantastic in Focus: New Perspectives*, ed. Allan Weiss (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2015), 21.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. 28.

⁴⁰² Ibid. 20.

⁴⁰³ Charles De Lint, "Considering Magical Realism in Canada," *Out of this World: Canadian Science Fiction & Fantasy Literature*, eds. Allan Weiss and Hugh Spencer, comp. Andrea Paradis (Kingston: Quarry Press & National Library of Canada, 1995), 115. De Lint's criticism is true of the term "urban fantasy" as well, but I am deeply wary of genre terminology that bases its boundaries on a division between high and low culture, particularly as no one who draws these lines seems to be willing to occupy the territory that they have designated as lower.

invoking a South American postcolonial literary genre, positioning his work as high culture that owes more to Jorge Luis Borges than it does to J.R.R. Tolkien.

De Lint's first novels, *Moonheart* and the high fantasy *The Riddle of the Wren*, appeared in 1984. His work emphasizes creativity and community. Characters often have long--sometimes too-long--conversations about the role of magic and art in their lives, their responsibilities to their fellow creatures, and the ethical dilemmas they face.

This chapter--and the chapters that follow—will examine four aspects of six texts. One of these is the construction of the world in which the story is set, and how it affects the moral landscape of the stories that can be told there. For example, in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, evil is satanic evil, woven into the fabric of the world, and biologically encoded in the creatures who inhabit Mordor. I also examine the role of the city--why *urban* fantasy for this author? What difference does the urban setting make? A third aspect is the protagonists, and their own moral reasoning. If much can be gained from one instance of a viewpoint privileged by the author--either as an echo of his or her own beliefs, or an example of an interesting dilemma, or even as a projected holder of beliefs the author finds problematic--then across multiple books, the effect is intensified, traits turning into trends.

In some cases it is useful to focus on special problems and cases in each author's body of works. For example, in de Lint's work, it is useful to spend some time on race as it appears in his books. Ethnic diversity is one of the multiplicities of the city, and one of the aspects of the world that high fantasy has traditionally not handled adeptly. The duty of representation aside, "race" and "species" are often synonymous in high fantasy, and when these races are monolithic, with less complexity attributed to their members than to humans, it is possible to encode evil biologically. De Lint's work is an example of an

attempt to do better, to negotiate ethnic diversity in a genre that has typically been dominated by white authors and targeted to white audiences, and it is not entirely successful. Finally, of course, there will be a discussion of the sources of evil in each text.

Construction of the Worlds

De Lint's early urban fantasies are set in contemporary Ottawa. Although the appeal of setting a fantasy in a recognizable location is considerable, in 1993, de Lint released *Dreams Underfoot*, a collection of short stories all set in the fictional city of Newford. Newford is treated as if it exists in the real world: characters listen to bands and join causes that the contemporary reader would recognize. The Newford stories take place in the same universe as the Ottawa stories, making occasional references to the same characters.

In de Lint's created world, European fairies, who followed the Europeans across the ocean, co-exist with Indigenous magical people and with humans, albeit not always comfortably or happily. Holly Rue co-owns a bookstore with a hob; Redding High School is kept up by brownies who have, through neglect, become more maliciously mischievous than is typical for their type. There is a fairy court at the local mall. Fairies come in many shapes. Some of them choose to look human⁴⁰⁴; some are smaller, with subtly changed features; and some do not have a human appearance at all. They have a diversity of forms, abilities, and points of view. Fairies, and others, have made inroads into the digital world,

⁴⁰⁴ One of the characters mocks the seeress Mother Crone for choosing to look like a young skate punk (De Lint, *Widdershins*, 43). In terms of the reclaiming of the city, this seems designed to make people look twice at skate punks.

too: Holly's computer was once infested by pixies, a protean giant operates a website, creatures that ordinarily incorporate twigs and moss into their bodies also use electronic components, and Legba, the Voudun god of crossroads and doorways, is interested in establishing an online presence.

This scheme--fairies and spirits that take many forms, have their own allegiances and conflicts, are intertwined with many aspects of human life--emphasizes that although magical creatures in de Lint's world are different from humans, they are not a monolithic whole, nor are they newly arrived, nor does the fact of their presence constitute a threat to humans. This works to both negotiate genre--locating De Lint's work as fantasy rather than horror--and to suggest a certain positioning in relation to the Other.

In *Moonheart* (1984), the earliest book to be studied here, the scheme on which de Lint eventually settles is not fully worked out. The Otherworld is an exclusively Indigenous North American one, populated by four kinds of spirits. One kind of spirit becomes, in his later fiction, the Cousins⁴⁰⁵, who claim to predate the First Nations people, and are not all Indigenous North Americans. Shapeshifters who can shift between human form and that of their clan animal, they have their own feuds with each other, and a longstanding feud with the fairies. The fairies are therefore confined to the cities, while the Cousins tend to prefer rural and forested areas.

The later developments involving the Cousins appear to correct problems with de Lint's original scheme. The presence of--and feud with--European fairies allows de Lint to draw a version of the Celtic fairy tradition into his work while also acknowledging the problems created by colonialism. At the same time, however, the claim that the Cousins

⁴⁰⁵ De Lint does not capitalize the word; I will, for clarity.

predate Indigenous People is itself problematic, because on a superficial level it allows him to claim that his use of them in his stories is not cultural appropriation, even as he outfits them with the trappings of Indigenous culture. Although de Lint has never explicitly claimed it, there is an implication that he has gone back to the source from which actual Indigenous People have derived their traditions; that his fiction is more authentic than the reality.

In addition to the workaday world of the books--what Christy Riddell, a character who collects urban folklore, calls the World As It Is--there is the Otherworld, a patchwork of realms that take a variety of forms. Among these are the Wordwood, a website that houses every book published; the Cathedral Forest, which houses the Eadar, memorable book characters brought to life by readers' belief; and Mabon, a modern city. There appear to be as many realms to the Otherworld as there are characters who inhabit or access it, and just as many *ways* of accessing it. De Lint's Otherworld serves as a sort of unified field theory, giving his many different and diverse characters a way for their personal visions of the Otherworld to be true without negating others.

A third sphere of existence is the afterlife, although it takes different forms for different people. Afterlives are particularly important to the moral landscape of fantasy, because of their status as places of judgement, punishment, and reward in Western religious traditions. There is a sense in which the character of the afterlife in a given universe constitutes a final moral judgement. Raylene Carter, during her near-death experience in *The Onion Girl*, finds oblivion, but with it, moral clarity.⁴⁰⁶ In *Blue Girl*, the ghost Adrian Dumbrell haunts the high school where he died. When he chooses to move

⁴⁰⁶ Charles de Lint, *The Onion Girl* (New York: Tor, 2001), 446.

on, the door to what comes next appears as a stone arch in the middle of the city⁴⁰⁷, and he is conducted there by John Narraway, who denies his angelhood⁴⁰⁸, but does seem to have a great deal of knowledge about the workings of the facet of the magical world to which they are exposed.⁴⁰⁹ In *Widdershins*, however, the Cousin Joe Crazy Dog dies in a fight and finds himself on a mist-shrouded beach.⁴¹⁰ His recently deceased opponent paddles a canoe to the opposite shore, the afterlife⁴¹¹; Joe stays, and is rescued.⁴¹² These suggest that De Lint's conception of the afterlife (at variance with those advanced by Lackey and Armstrong) is not one of a place of judgment, but rather of discovery, education, and potential atonement. This in turn is a reflection of the moral landscape of his fiction.

For white humans, magic is neither wholly learned, nor wholly genetic, nor wholly thrust upon unwitting people from outside sources. In De Lint's earlier books, it appears that characters encounter magic simply by being open to it. At the beginning of *Onion Girl*, recurring protagonist Jilly Coppercorn explains it thus:

In terms of what Professor Dapple calls consensual reality--that the world is as it is because that's how we've all agreed it is--I seem to carry this magical bubble world around me, inside and hidden from the world we all inhabit. A strange and wonderful world where the implausible becomes not only possible, but probable. It doesn't matter if, most of the time, I'm the only one that can see it, though that's

⁴⁰⁷ Charles de Lint, *The Blue Girl* (New York: Tor, 2004), 363.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid. 365.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. 149-152.

⁴¹⁰ Charles de Lint, *Widdershins* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2006), 441.

⁴¹¹ Ibid. 444.

⁴¹² Ibid. 453.

probably why I paint what I do; I'm trying to show the rest of the world this weird little corner of reality that I inhabit.

I see things from the corner of my eye that shouldn't be there, but are, if only for a brief, flickering moment. At a flea market, an old black teapot turns into a badger and scurries away. Late at night, a lost boy sits on the windowsill of the second-floor nursery in the apartment beside the Chinese grocery down the street from my studio, a tiny spark of light dancing around his shoulders as he peers in through the leaded panes. Later still, I hear the muted sound of hooves on the pavement and look out to see the dreadlocked gnome that Christy calls Long, his gnarled little fingers playing with a string of elf-knots that can call up the wind as he rides his pig Brigwin to the goblin market.

Oh, and the gargoyles---sitting high up on their perches, pretending to be stone while having long conversations with pigeons and crows. I've caught them twitching, moving from one position to another, the sly look that freezes mid-wink when they realize I'm watching.

But then I've always had a fertile imagination and it was many years before I realized that most people don't experience these extraordinary glimpses the way I do. For the longest time I thought they simply wouldn't admit to it.⁴¹³

In a number of Newford stories, magic, or the ability to perceive it, surfaces through the targeted refinement of inborn traits. By the end of *Onion Girl*, it transpires that Jilly has gotten her magic from telling stories to an old oak tree sacred to Nokomis. *Memory and*

⁴¹³ de Lint, *The Onion Girl* 14-15.

Dream protagonist Isabelle Copley was taught her magic by the painter Vincent Rushkin. And in *Blue Girl*, recurring character Esmeralda Foylan says, in digital communication with the high-school student Maxine:

[S]ome of us carry traces of older and stranger genetic codes, bits and pieces of deep-rooted secrets and mythological beings who were once as real as you and I, but are mostly long gone now. Ghost traces of them remain in many of us, and in a very few, the traces run stronger--strong enough to attract the attention of beings such as the animithim. They can remain hidden for... well, forever I suppose. But contact with elements of the Otherworld will often spark an awakening, and the next thing you know you have all these myths stirring under your skin.⁴¹⁴

Reference to the genetic code marks *Blue Girl* as one of de Lint's later books. This explanation, combining heredity and environment, navigates between two equally unpalatable prospects that arise when injecting magic into the modern Western world: the idea that access to magic is restricted by birthright to a fortunate few, and the idea that magic is available to all comers, and that those who do not experience it simply do not want it enough. The rules work differently, however, for non-white humans, a problem which merits its own section.

Parahuman people (the nonhuman, the used-to-be-human, and the now-human) are frequently point-of-view characters in De Lint's work. In his earlier work, the narration of their actions is brief, limited, and done at one remove. Parahumans in de Lint's work often

⁴¹⁴ de Lint, *The Blue Girl* 232.

give human characters insight into the way the worlds work, and in these earlier books, there is nothing to suggest that these insights are not absolutely authoritative. In later work, correspondent with an increase in their complexity, the distance between the human and the parahuman shrinks. Their information about the world can be limited, incorrect, or warped by their own biases. Some parahuman characters function as protagonists, and it is possible to see that they doubt themselves, their perceptions of the world, and even their own ontological status.

That is how magic works in de Lint's world. Now, what does it *do*?

Demands of the plot aside, as I hinted at the end of the last chapter, magic works thematically in de Lint's texts to make connections that would otherwise be tenuous and distant appear concrete, explicit, and personal. Enchantment, in a Tolkienian sense, is the reward for making friends with unlikely people, or creating art and sharing stories, or treating supposedly unmindful aspects of the world with respect--all acts that in and of themselves make cities more livable. Conversely, magic also lays bare the full harm done by the rejection of those connections. Small kindnesses and small wrongs are magnified, as when, in *Blue Girl*, Adrian's desire for the living Imogene's approval brings her to the attention of the *anamithim*⁴¹⁵, or in *Spirits in the Wires*, publisher Aaran Goldstein's petty revenge causes the disappearance of hundreds⁴¹⁶, or in *Widdershins*, violinist Lizzie Mahone's burying of the deer killed by the Bogan Boys wins her the help of the cousins.⁴¹⁷ One must be kind no matter what, this ethic says, because just as one never knows when the filthy traveller may be Zeus in disguise, one never knows who or what is watching.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. 151.

⁴¹⁶ Charles de Lint, *Spirits in the Wires* (New York: Tor, 2003), 76, 106, 140.

⁴¹⁷ de Lint, *Widdershins*, 29.

The Role of the City

In *Moonheart*, part of the value of the city is juxtapositional. Tamson House sits in the middle of downtown Ottawa, a house magically bound to the descendants of the druid Thomas Hengwyr, and to the Otherworld itself. Protagonist Sara Kendall finds magical treasures, including Taliesin's ring, in the back of an antique shop, and a magical battle occurs at a nearby coffee shop. Gangsters find themselves fighting off wolverine-like creatures called tragg'a, Mounties troop through a gap in time and space, and Blue, the ex-biker, rides his motorcycle through the Otherworld. But there is a strong sense in this early book that de Lint privileges the forest over the city. Sara tells Ha'kan'ta, one of the Indigenous spirits she meets in the Otherworld, "Where we come from it seems like they've tamed everything." Ha'kan'ta responds, "Then it is a sorry world you come from."⁴¹⁸ It is as if de Lint sees his job, in *Moonheart*, as pointing to the things that surround and predate the city, and arguing that these are a source of authenticity.

This stance appears to be mitigated somewhat in the later Ottawa novels, and by the time of the switch to Newford, the city has been recast as a site of wonder. De Lint says of the switch:

I just wanted to write in a big, urban setting with a lot of urban decay that I don't have in Ottawa. I hadn't lived long enough in any place to feel comfortable writing about it because I'd get called, you know, someone would say, 'Well, you know, that one-way street goes the other way, or, what do you mean there's a museum right

⁴¹⁸ de Lint, *Moonheart* 183.

there?'--that kind of stuff. So I thought I'd just write the short story ["Timeskip"] and set it in a made-up city, and I'll just take whatever I need from all the ones I *have* visited. I had actually been to large urban centers, but didn't have the familiarity to write about a real one. And I didn't actually give that place a name until four or five stories in.⁴¹⁹

Although de Lint momentarily loses the advantage of a city that is familiar to his Ottawa readers, lexical choices that treat Newford's geography with casual familiarity make this new city equally accessible to all readers. Newford has plausible neighbourhoods, and habitual readers of de Lint will come to know its various landmarks. De Lint has said that Canadians tend to think that Newford is an American city, while Americans think that Newford is Canadian. The justice system, however, is American.⁴²⁰ This allows de Lint to more easily market to American audiences, and to tailor the city to his needs.

Along with the usual sorts of neighbourhoods--the business district, the artistic neighbourhood, the former artistic neighbourhood that gentrified, and the Old Market, to name a few--there are other neighbourhoods well suited to de Lint's stories. The Tombs is a burned-out shell of a neighbourhood filled with derelict buildings, and a haven for the dispossessed. Old City is a portion of the city that fell underground during an earthquake; residents rebuilt on top, leaving an intact city underground. These fill a need for de Lint, one that could not be fulfilled in Ottawa: in the Tombs, people somewhat out of the ordinary can exist while remaining ignored by the general public, so that the only people

⁴¹⁹ Charles de Lint, interview with James Palmer, "Music and Myth: A Conversation with Charles de Lint," *Internet Review of Science Fiction*, September 2006, June 14, 2011 <<http://www.irosf.com/q/zine/article/10314>>.

⁴²⁰ "Frequently Asked Question: Newford," 29 April 2013 <www.sfsite.com/charlesdelint/faq01.htm>.

who know about them are the disenfranchised and desperately poor. Old City is a hermetically sealed haven for wonders--a literal city underneath the city. Both areas are urban environments that can be fraught with danger without scaring readers about urban areas in general, violating the rules of plausibility, or contradicting what readers know about a particular actual city.

In these later books, the relationship between country and city is more comfortable. *Memory and Dream* protagonist Isabelle Copley views her childhood home, Wren Island, as a haven of sorts, but recognizes that there are things she simply cannot get there. And for Jilly and Raylene, rural environments are actually fraught with menace.⁴²¹ This may be, in part, a function of the transition from Ottawa to Newford⁴²²; it could also be a reflection of social change, as crime rates began to drop, initiatives to make the city a better living space multiplied, and--perhaps a touch ironically--the manufacturing sector declined, taking industry, with its ugliness and toxicity, east and south to people who are not acknowledged as consumers or creators of genre fantasy. It could also be the effect of change in the genre: other authors, taking their cues from de Lint, may have further opened up urban space for magic; or the budding genre may simply have proved that there was no need to privilege the forest over the city.

De Lint is steadfast, however, in the Tolkienian critique of industry. In *The Onion Girl*, Toby the Boyce, an Eadar, must pass through “the factory world” on his way to find vervain for Jilly:

⁴²¹ de Lint, *The Onion Girl* 244-248.

⁴²² I could not say without making a study of de Lint's other Ottawa-based books; so far, they all seem to like cities a bit better than *Moonheart*.

It didn't take long for the trees to die around him. At first the lush boughs above simply changed to yellowing leaves, as though he was walking into autumn. But soon even the foliage was gone and he traveled under empty, dead boughs, the ground underfoot changing from leaves and grass to dry dirt that rose in plumes of dust behind him. The next clearing announced itself long before he could see it with a dissonant roar of hammering and clanking that grew louder with every step he took in its direction. Then the trees were gone and he walked under gray, oppressive skies, the air thick with a metallic taste and smelling of sulfur and iron.

Soon there were buildings all around him, some falling in upon themselves, others rearing skyward for story upon story of dull, graying brick and stone, glass and steel. The ever-present thunder of unrecognizable machinery going through inexplicable tasks came from them, their only tangible result appearing to be the chaotic noise that ensued.

Nothing grew or seemed to live in this place and visitors were few and far between, even with so many quicklands paths meeting one another here as they did. The toxic fumes and proximity of so much iron-bearing metalwork was anathema to many denizens of the dreamlands. The ground was rutted and picked with hidden sinkholes where pools of cyanide and chemical waste lay in wait for the careless traveler.⁴²³

Why there is such a place in the Otherworld is never explained, although as there is every other kind of place, it stands to reason that an industrial wasteland would be there as well.

⁴²³ de Lint, *The Onion Girl* 408.

It is, as the quotation indicated, something of a transportation hub, but the factory world itself seems entirely unpopulated. It may be the equivalent of the Forest Perilous, in a world where forests are not particularly perilous.

Taken as a whole, the body of de Lint's work suggests that cities are not--or rather, must not be--throwaway places, to be built up, exploited, and abandoned for the suburbs at the earliest possible opportunity. That is not the appropriate connection to have with cities, or the people and creatures who inhabit them. He sees great value in storytelling and the communities it creates⁴²⁴, in the arts, and in people who have been marginalized. By emphasizing these things, he celebrates what makes the city livable, and argues for more of it.

Protagonists

De Lint's books reject the concept of essential or elemental evil. There are villains, but they act for complex reasons. Before I talk about antagonists, though, it is useful to talk about his protagonists, and their moral decisions.

De Lint's novels have a patchwork structure, stitched together by the narratives of many characters. But the author's major protagonists--who, John Clute complains, are "nearly indistinguishable"⁴²⁵, are almost exclusively white, female, petite, and artistic. Often estranged from their families in some way, they enter the affinity-based family of the city's artistic community.

⁴²⁴ Adam S. Guzkowski, "Memory, Magic, and Meaning: Storytelling and the Creation of Community in Charles de Lint's Newford Collections," *Further Perspectives on the Canadian Fantastic: Proceedings of the 2003 Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. Allan Weiss (Toronto: ACCSFF, 2005), 116.

⁴²⁵ John Clute, "De Lint, Charles (Henri Diederick Hoefsmit)," *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, eds. John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), 264.

i) Sara Kendell

Sara Kendell is the twentysomething protagonist of *Moonheart*. Left independently wealthy after the death of her parents in a car crash, she does not need to work for a living, but nevertheless helps her uncle run an antique shop while she works on her own writing. Her finding of Taliesin's ring puts her in contact with the Welsh bard, who tutors her in magic. The final battle for the ring is fought in Sara's own soul, as she resists the malevolent entity Mal'ek'a, who tries to snuff her out in order to gain possession of the ring's power. In learning that Mal'ek'a is the shadow of the Welsh druid Thomas Hengwyr, she gains the creature's true name, and passes it to her friends, who use it to defeat him. But Sara also learns that she is a descendant of Hengwyr, and for a time worries that she is tainted by his evil. Ha'kan'ta, one of the spirits, tells her:

We all have good and ill within us. Such is the way that Mother Bear formed us. That is why we strive for peace--we who follow the Way. We strive to keep the one at bay while we add potency to the other. [...] You must fare on your own, with your own strengths, quelling your own weaknesses. Others can guide you, or share your burdens awhile, but in the end it is you who must choose between the one and the other. Only you can decide which you will be--a Thomas Hengwyr or a Mal'ek'a. For though they sprang from the same source, they were never the same.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ de Lint, *Moonheart*, 424.

As with the relationship between Harry Potter and Voldemort in the previous chapter, Ha'kan'ta's statement constitutes a rejection of the idea of evil as a function of biology, lineage, or type. Sara is not tainted by her relationship with Mal'ek'a, but she must come to terms with that connection and manage it in a healthy way. Laurence Steven argues that Mal'ek'a represents colonialism itself, in that Sara and Jamie, its descendants, must take responsibility for defeating it.⁴²⁷

Against such characters as Isabelle Copley or Jilly Coppercorn, Sara Kendell, wealthy and a bit sheltered, is a little colourless. However, she was among the first of her type--the small, fierce women who populate not just de Lint's work, but urban fantasy in general.

ii) Isabelle Copley

Isabelle Copley is an artist who has left the family farm on Wren Island, against her emotionally abusive father's wishes, and gone to study art at Butler University in Newford. There she meets, in addition to friends whom readers of the Newford short stories will recognize, the famous but reclusive painter Vincent Rushkin, who becomes her mentor. He is controlling and occasionally physically abusive, but he is also a gifted painter and teacher, and Isabelle keeps returning to him, aided by a memory that edits the trauma out of events. While Isabelle forgets, the reader has full access to what is really happening, and is aware long before any of the characters that Rushkin is dangerous and manipulative, and does not deserve the benefit of the doubt, which she continues to extend to him. However,

⁴²⁷ Laurence Steven, "Welwyn Wilton Katz and Charles de Lint: New Fantasy as a Canadian Post-colonial Genre," *Worlds of Wonder*, eds. Camille La Bossière and Jean-François Leroux (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), 68-69.

Rushkin is the one who helps her to develop her own gifts, teaching her to paint in such a way that beings will come out of the ether and inhabit the forms that she paints for them.

The first of these creatures, which her best friend Kathy calls numena, is John Sweetgrass, who has an instinctive hatred for Rushkin. He and Isabelle date until she realizes unequivocally that he came from her painting, at which point he says the power dynamics of their relationship have changed, telling her, "We can't meet as equals anymore. Every time you look at me now, you're going to be reminded of how you brought me across from the before. You feel responsible for me. You think that I can't be who or what I want to be without affirmation from you."⁴²⁸

Isabelle's life is defined by two linked struggles. One of these is to stand up to Vincent Rushkin--to manage her connection to him and the other abusive authority figures in her life--and in this she is never completely successful on her own. When she is young, she edits her memory, blames herself for his abuse of her, changes studios to protect her work from him, and eventually flees from him while telling herself and everyone else that her injuries are the result of a mugging. The older Isabelle attempts suicide so that Rushkin can no longer use her.⁴²⁹ It is John who, in Izzy's dreamtime, is able to defeat Rushkin, by the simple expedient of shooting him.⁴³⁰ Interestingly, *to John Sweetgrass* Rushkin would possess many of the Tolkienian characteristics of evil: his example of expressing anger through violence is a tempting one, his influence poisons the woman John loves, John senses his presence as evil, and he treats the numena as food rather than fellow people; but these characteristics are specific to the relationship between John and Rushkin. Isabelle's

⁴²⁸ de Lint, *Memory and Dream* 230.

⁴²⁹ Ibid. 532-533.

⁴³⁰ Ibid. 570.

character, meanwhile, is a study in how an intelligent, well-meaning person can, while acting in good faith, facilitate wrongdoing.

The other struggle that Isabelle faces is to settle the question of her responsibility to the numena she paints--to discover the appropriate connection to the people she has brought into the world, who are profoundly different from her. John points out that bringing the numena over is a very serious act, and he is critical of her for doing so⁴³¹, especially as she is reluctant to admit that Rushkin is a predator who feeds on them. Kathy, Isabelle's best friend, disagrees, pointing out how happy the numena are to be alive, and says, "[...] I do think you were given a gift and to not use it, to not give these beings a chance to live--the *choice* to live--is to abuse that gift. [...] Sure it's a dangerous world out there, but it's just as dangerous for us and we make do."⁴³² Both have good arguments for their positions. Isabelle wavers between the two. At first she is caught up in the mastery of her skill, in learning its rules and parameters, in verifying that she is not imagining things, but when she begins to suspect Rushkin is preying on her numena, she becomes far more cautious. She eventually moves her paintings to her family home on Wren Island to protect them, and when a fire--set by Rushkin --destroys all but a handful of her paintings, killing their numena, she forswears representational art altogether, and becomes an abstract painter until an old friend asks her to illustrate a posthumous volume of Kathy's stories.

Like Sara Kendell, Isabelle is tormented by her relationship with her antagonist. Unlike Sara, whose link is biological, Isabelle can break with Rushkin by refusing to paint numena, but this means cutting herself off from their magic. Over the course of the novel, Isabelle discovers that she herself is culpable, that she has enabled Rushkin to do

⁴³¹ Ibid. 230.

⁴³² Ibid. 259.

monstrous things. Her crushing guilt, however, is not a productive response: it paralyzes her and isolates her. She overcomes Rushkin through the creative process, and although her creations are not strong enough to defeat Rushkin in her reality, their ability to defeat him in her dreams is enough.

With Rushkin vanquished, Isabelle paints her younger self together with Kathy, whose suicide note revealed she had come from an abusive home, and always carried a torch for Isabelle. In her painting, Isabelle “fixes” Kathy’s past and her own straightness⁴³³, so that there is a sense in which her younger self and Kathy can be together forever, while Isabelle the elder renews her relationship with John Sweetgrass. Isabelle has always regarded the numena as people, but the events of the plot have created enough of a cognitive shift that she sees them also as self, as lover, as best friend.

iii) Jilly Coppercorn

Jilly Coppercorn is the protagonist of many of de Lint’s Newford-based short stories, a friend or offhand acquaintance of the protagonists of many others, and according to de Lint’s forewords, a reader favourite⁴³⁴. An artist, she makes a point of knowing people from all walks of life, listening to their stories, and taking them at face value. In *The Ivory and the Horn*, the second Newford collection, Jilly discloses to the reader and certain other characters that she herself was sexually abused by her older brother, ran away from home, and ended up living on the streets in Newford; her trust of other people is not the product of naïveté, but rather a conscious choice. In *The Onion Girl* and *Widdershins*, Jilly--whose

⁴³³ Ibid. 587.

⁴³⁴ De Lint, *Widdershins* 9.

adventures in other books have largely consisted of finding appropriate ways to respond to and engage with the magic in her life--must come to terms with her own past.

The Onion Girl opens with Jilly's being hit by a car. While recovering in the hospital, she discovers that she can walk in the Otherworld she has seen in glimpses all her life, and that someone who bears a striking resemblance to her hates her enough to have destroyed her paintings while she lay in a coma. Jilly and her friends initially seek a magical explanation, but they eventually trace the destruction to her younger sister, who was left behind when Jilly ran away from home, and became their brother's target.

As Jilly recovers in the World As It Is--although the chances for her complete recovery look very uncertain--she embarks on an Otherworld quest for healing. Her sister stalks her into the Otherworld, however, captures her, and is about to kill her, but has a change of heart just in time to stop a bullet meant for Jilly. Jilly readily uses her one chance at healing to resurrect her sister. This prompts a visitation from White Deer Woman, who originally gifted Jilly and her sister with magic. Jilly argues to her that her sister deserves a second chance at life; when asked if her brother deserves the same, Jilly replies, "No[.] [...]. What he did to us was purely evil."⁴³⁵ When White Deer Woman probes further, Jilly abruptly changes the subject: there is no way to reconcile de Lint's scheme of the world and its people with child molestation, and the text is not only aware of this, but foregrounds it.

Jilly's sister at first resents her sacrifice, but they begin a cautious truce by swapping stories. Afterward, Jilly tells one of the Eadar:

⁴³⁵ de Lint, *The Onion Girl* 433.

I didn't really do it for her[.] [...] I did it for me. It didn't matter whether she was grateful or not; it was something I had to do for my own peace of mind. And not because of what Joe said about how if I can heal the old hurts in me, there are people he knows who will be able to heal the new ones. [...] I've made a kind of peace inside myself--you know, with my guilt over how I treated her. But it doesn't change the fact that I *did* abandon her--not once, but twice now. And it doesn't change what our brother did to both of us. I don't have it in me to forgive or forget that.⁴³⁶

In *Widdershins*, Jilly is still unable to paint, and can walk only short distances. When she accompanies her friend Geordie on a road trip, a bogan prank traps Jilly in a portion of the Otherworld that is, in effect, her own mind, where she is still a child and her brother has absolute power. There she meets the Eadar she created as a young reader. She identified with one of them, Mattie, enough that Mattie is now traumatized by the abuse too, and has thrown her lot in with Jilly's brother. After being rescued, Jilly returns to that corner of her mind to break her brother's power over her once and for all. She does so by calling on Raylene--imagining her into the story so to speak, and using the power of the story to make it so.⁴³⁷ Just as she once used stories to gain a respite from her home life, Jilly is able to harness stories to change what goes on in her mind, binding her brother and reversing the changes he has worked on her.⁴³⁸ Her sister asks if, having done this, she will close down this part of her mind, and Jilly replies:

⁴³⁶ Ibid. 465.

⁴³⁷ de Lint, *Widdershins* 450.

⁴³⁸ Ibid. 451-452.

All of this is a part of who I am. I already tried to cut it out of my memories and hide it away. And you see how well that turned out. [...] Him I'll once upon a time into something better. But this place, the memories...I'm just going to accept that it all happened. That it wasn't my fault. And get on with the real business of my life.⁴³⁹

She tells her brother, "You're always going to be in my head. [...] Except it's no longer on your terms. It's on mine."⁴⁴⁰ Every time he thinks ill towards her, he will shrink to half his size. It takes very little time for him to dwindle into nothing.⁴⁴¹ Freed, Jilly apologizes to Mattie, who is unmoved until Jilly gives her the opportunity to write the end of the story⁴⁴², although Mattie turns the responsibility back over to Jilly. Certain now that the Eadar she created will be safe, Jilly returns to her friends, and is now able to avail herself of the magical healing offered to her, and marry her best friend, another Newford mainstay, Geordie Riddell.

It is Jilly's generosity of spirit--a quality that is deliberately cultivated rather than innate--and her ability to tell stories that allow her to win her sister to her side, overcome the hold her traumatic memories have on her, and even heal completely after her car accident.⁴⁴³ However, one unsettling aspect of Jilly's character is her guilt over the experiences of Mattie, the Eadar. In one sense, it follows that if the products of one's imagination have personhood, then, as with other people, lack of intent to harm them is less important than the impact. On the other hand, the idea that an abused child's act of

⁴³⁹ Ibid. 460.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. 481.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid. 482-483.

⁴⁴² Ibid. 498.

⁴⁴³ Although the implication that able-bodiedness is a reward for personal growth is more than a little troubling.

seeking solace in books has the same impact as years of molestation is appalling.⁴⁴⁴ As laudable as de Lint's points about responsibility and the connectedness of all things usually are, Jilly's culpability in this matter feels contrived and frivolous. Mattie makes more sense as a character if her forgiveness of Jilly is Jilly's way of dealing with the guilt that abuse survivors sometimes feel, a way that has no patience with platitudes. However, it takes some work to read her like this; the book treats her as a character that Jilly has wronged.

iv) Raylene Carter

Raylene Carter is Jilly Coppercorn's younger sister. Her life, more than that of any other character in de Lint's books, is a study of moral choice, the circumstances that allow a human being to freely choose things that would horrify most readers, and the circumstances under which a person can decide to make better choices.

When Jilly left, their older brother started abusing Raylene. In Jilly's darkest hour, as a drug-addicted sex worker on the streets of Newford, she was found by Lou Fucceri, a young beat cop⁴⁴⁵, and grudgingly accepted the help that he and countless others were willing to give her. Raylene, however, is denied the opportunity to create such a support network. She has only her best friend Pinky Miller, who is fiercely loyal, but quick to do violence to anyone she sees as a threat. It is Pinky who teaches Raylene to use a knife, which she uses to defend herself against the sexual predations of her brother, leaving him

⁴⁴⁴ On yet a third hand, biting into a piece of inexpensive chocolate is an act that supports child slavery.

⁴⁴⁵ de Lint, *The Onion Girl* 133.

lame for life.⁴⁴⁶ Raylene and Pinky leave town together, travelling across the country, sometimes engaging in petty crime, and sometimes taking legal jobs.

During a period of depression, Raylene finds solace in dreams of being a wolf⁴⁴⁷, dreams that Pinky, doing time in prison, comes to share. With their pack, they run through the Otherworld forests, chasing down and killing deer, giving Raylene an outlet for “that piece of darkness I found inside me the night I cut my brother Del and set myself free. I couldn’t go around killing things in my day-to-day life [...] so I killed ‘em here, in my wolf dreams.”⁴⁴⁸ Pinky is the one who raises the possibility that the deer are dreamers too, and that the dreams of killing them may have moral weight:

‘...But thinking ‘bout it now, I ain’t so sure how I feel. I mean, if they’re dyin’ for real and all, maybe what we’re doin’ ain’t right.’

I shrug. ‘They shoulda chose a tougher body.’

‘But we didn’t choose. What makes you think they did?’

‘So what are you saying? We should stop a-hunting?’

She shakes her head. ‘No, I’m just thinkin’ is all. You do a lotta thinkin’ in a place like this.’⁴⁴⁹

Pinky and Raylene are capable of moral reasoning, but their upbringings and their experience have afforded them no sense of connection with the people around them. Exploited all of their lives, they have a sense of right and wrong, but Raylene’s experience

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. 39.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid. 119.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. 159.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. 164.

of the world has injustice at the very foundations of it, and under those circumstances, acting in the service of an abstract concept of right is a luxury, and subordinating their own interests to it--especially when the culture that has conveyed that concept of right to them has used them so harshly--is absurd. In fact, Pinky herself later tells Raylene, "The world don't turn on right and wrong. It's just what it is and you and me, we got to make the best of it how we can."⁴⁵⁰ They soon move from their standard prey to unicorns, a decision that incurs the wrath of the canid Cousins.⁴⁵¹

The news that Jilly has been hit by a car triggers rage in Raylene, although she is unmoved by similar mention of her brother, and she explains her anger by saying, "I guess it's that Del was always bad, so anything he ever done to me never come as no surprise. But she, she betrayed me, and that cuts the heart deeper than anything I can imagine, and I can imagine plenty. It's a hurt that just don't go away."⁴⁵² She and Pinky drive to Newford and break into Jilly's apartment, and with a bewildered but supportive Pinky looking on, Raylene destroys Jilly's fairy paintings, thinking:

I'm just focused on this dark place inside me, thinking of all of them fairy tales my sister told me and how they come true for her, maybe, but she sure didn't leave me living in no fairy tale. Where was my happy ending with Del coming into my room, night after night, and me just a little girl?

[...]

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid. 277.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. 214.

⁴⁵² de Lint, *Widdershins* 280.

I got no time for words. All I got is a red haze over my eyes making everything look like it's got a film of blood covering it.⁴⁵³

Raylene, despite her making choices that many readers would not make, is generally understandable, even likeable. But where de Lint must explain her treatment of Jilly, Raylene's anger is irrational. Shortly afterward, Raylene encounters Jilly in the Otherworld and realizes she has a presence there too⁴⁵⁴, and decides to kill her. Raylene tells Pinky, "No way I'm sharing this with her. [...] All my life, everything that's gone wrong with my life, it was her doing. I can't let her have the dreamlands, too."⁴⁵⁵

By observing the cousins, who have Raylene and Pinky under surveillance, Raylene discovers the trick of crossing into the Otherworld physically.⁴⁵⁶ This she uses to kidnap Jilly from her hospital room and take her body to the Otherworld, so that Jilly's Otherworld self is forced to join them. But when they meet again, Raylene is surprised to find that her rage is gone. She says, "Don't get me wrong. I ain't about to turn this into no Hallmark moment or nothing. But I see her standing up there on the side of that hill and I wonder how I could ever have expected more of her."⁴⁵⁷ Jilly says that she would die for Raylene, and Raylene realizes she means it. When Pinky Miller shoots at Jilly, Raylene jumps in the way of the bullet, explaining, "This's got nothing to do with what my sister said 'bout her being willing to die for me. It's about stopping something wrong, that's all. Plain and simple."⁴⁵⁸ She welcomes the peace.⁴⁵⁹ With it comes a bit of (heavy-handed) moral clarity:

⁴⁵³ de Lint, *The Onion Girl* 282.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid. 297.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid. 298.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid. 357.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid. 417.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid. 419.

I was never no sociopath freak, don't know better, thinks the whole [...] world's just a-circling 'round her. I only acted like I didn't know. Like I didn't care. But I knew I was doing wrong. And maybe I never let on or nothing, but that knowing left a shadow on me--Catholic guilt, I'm guessing. [...]

I don't feel forgiven--that'd be asking too much of anybody. But I do feel forgotten. Like the world's going on and nobody's thinking 'bout me, for good or bad. I'm just off their radar and I like it.⁴⁶⁰

When Raylene is resurrected and meets White Deer Woman, she expresses anger at having that peace taken away, but her rage is expended on White Deer Woman, not Jilly herself; and it is White Deer Woman who breaks the news that Pinky is dead.⁴⁶¹ Unlike Jilly, Raylene has no patience for her, telling Jilly later, "She was some disappointed in me, but like I told her. She wanted things to work out different, she could've been a little more forthcoming 'bout it all. I mean, how the hell were we supposed to know what she give us?"⁴⁶² Although their interaction results in White Deer Woman banishing Raylene from the Otherworld⁴⁶³, it allows Raylene to return to Jilly when the worst of her reaction is already over. Their conversation is brief but not acrimonious, until Jilly asks if Raylene was driving the car that hit her--she was not--and Raylene runs away.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. 446.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. 446.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid. 450.

⁴⁶² Ibid. 458.

⁴⁶³ Ibid. 453.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. 462.

At the end of the book, however, she stops in to visit Jilly, on her way back to Los Angeles to design software.⁴⁶⁵ By *Widdershins*, when Jilly calls Raylene to help her defeat her brother, Raylene acknowledges that she is “working on” being a good person.⁴⁶⁶

Raylene Carter is something of an achievement in fantasy: both protagonist and antagonist, a character who is not well-meaning-but-deluded, but not thoroughly unlikeable or incomprehensible either. Born into poverty and a dysfunctional family, she started out with significant disadvantages, and unlike Jilly, she has not been able to make a clean break. (On the other hand, the events of *Widdershins* suggest that Jilly’s clean break did more psychological damage.) Even her best qualities--her fierce loyalty, her intelligence, the light given to her and Jilly by Nokomis--are turned to bad ends, in large part because her upbringing has conditioned her to see herself as being at odds with the world, rather than a part of it. The book does not excuse her destructive choices, but at the same time, it shows that her life has been such that it would have been very hard to make other ones. Just as her past crimes are not due to any one factor in her life, but a whole confluence of them, her reform is a complex process that largely consists of creating connections.

Despite her occupying the place of the evil twin in Jilly’s story, Raylene’s antagonism falls into the category of moral wrong rather than mythical evil. Note that removing her from the realm of mythical evil makes her actions, although still wrong, comprehensible, and Raylene herself redeemable.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. 506.

⁴⁶⁶ De Lint, *Widdershins* 458.

v) Saskia Madding and Christiana Tree

The progression of de Lint's work is marked by a diminishing of the narrative distance the author creates between parahuman characters and the reader. Saskia Madding and Christiana Tree, the protagonists of *Spirits in the Wires*, both have Otherworldly origins: Saskia, was born in the Wordwood, an emissary of sorts, while Christiana Tree is Christy Riddell's--Saskia's boyfriend's--Jungian shadow. But both can pass as fully human too. Even though both Saskia and Christiana entertain doubts as to their status as real people, it is plain that de Lint is convinced of it, although he acknowledges that it would not be so easily answered for those whose identity revolves around it.

The two characters serve as foils for each other: Saskia is gentle and methodical, while Christiana is fierce, spontaneous, and brash. Both came into the world abruptly, Saskia knowing "there was a computer and paper trail tracing my background--where I was born, grew up, went to school--but I couldn't actually recall any of it"⁴⁶⁷; Christiana as "this seven-year-old girl who knew everything about being a seven-year-old boy, but nothing about being herself."⁴⁶⁸ Both characters have created credible human lives for themselves, and their own families of affinity.

It is possible to read Christiana and Saskia as refinements to the ethos of de Lint's fiction. Christiana is a corrective to de Lint's earlier portrayals of evil twins: a shadow twin who is a sympathetic protagonist. Saskia, meanwhile, as a sympathetic creation who has broken away from her creator, is the inverse of Vincent Rushkin. Both characters nudge

⁴⁶⁷ de Lint, *Spirits in the Wires* 25.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. 48.

the reader away from essentialist definitions of personhood and of evil, and towards functional definitions. The personal networks that they create for themselves are signs of healthy connections with the world, and although it does not automatically follow that every decision they make is a correct one, these connections inform their decision-making.

Christiana's moral reasoning is tested when she is faced with the embodied Leviathan at the centre of the Wordwood, which has reabsorbed Saskia and others. She has decided intuitively that killing him is the only way to halt the virus that is chewing its way through the Wordwood. In, for example, any of the books of the Belgariad, her actions would go unquestioned: their appropriateness *makes* them the right thing to do. As Christiana stands poised with the knife, however, she realizes that while there is a chance that killing the Leviathan's body will end the destruction of the Wordwood, there is also a chance that it will hasten it.⁴⁶⁹ Her reasoning in this case takes the form of thinking through the consequences, recalling the information that she has been given. In other words, moral reasoning in this case is not just about what is right, or who stands to gain or lose the most from her actions; Christiana is not fully certain of the rules that govern the Wordwood.

Christiana's instinctive actions in *Spirits in the Wires* are akin to, in *Blue Girl*, Imogene's throwing the blue paint on the *anamithim* to render them corporeal and vulnerable, which is another act of instinct, something that feels appropriate.⁴⁷⁰ The idea of instinct as a mode of cognition works well in *Blue Girl*, where a seemingly harmless act is effective against an ostensibly unstoppable enemy. For Christiana, however, her instinctive response is more fraught with difficulty. Christiana's intuition proves to be correct: killing

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. 386.

⁴⁷⁰ De Lint, *The Blue Girl* 357.

the giant's body allows him to resume his natural, noncorporeal form, and restores the Wordwood. However, the intuitive act involves stabbing someone in the throat, and if Christiana did this without qualms, it would make her a far less sympathetic character, or at least restore some of the distance between the human and the parahuman.

Careful, conscientious Saskia, on the other hand, acts in an understandable, completely human way, and arguably fares less well. After Aaran Goldstein takes revenge on her for humiliating him by infecting the Wordwood with a computer virus--an act that is supposed to be a nuisance, but causes the disappearance of hundreds--he is shocked out of his insufferability and suitably contrite, and volunteers to stay behind in the Wordwood to replace the rogue webmaster. A month later, however, he contacts Christiana from inside the website, and writes, "...I can multitask like you wouldn't believe now. But it's all Wordwood business. [...] ...there's not a whole lot of personal left. [...] I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm afraid I'll give in just like [the old webmaster] did. [...] I don't feel real anymore."⁴⁷¹ Saskia is present while she reads the message, and she responds to Aaran's cry for help by pushing the delete button. There is no apparent fallout for this, but given that she has suffered from the unintended consequences of one person's small vindictive act, it is troubling--albeit very human--that she would carry out her own. This may be an attempt to illustrate that Aaran has hurt Saskia beyond her ability to forgive, it may be an indication that the rules of connection will make allowances for human failing, it may set up conflict in a future novel, or it may simply be an inconsistency in de Lint's scheme.

⁴⁷¹ de Lint, *Spirits in the Wires* 445.

vii) Imogene Yeck and Maxine Chancy

Imogene Yeck and Maxine Chancy share the bulk of narration duties in *The Blue Girl*. Maxine is an outcast at Imogene's new school, and Imogene seeks her out for that reason.⁴⁷² Maxine warns Imogene that befriending her will get her ostracized by the other students, and Imogene replies, "Why would I want to be friends with people like that? [...] And besides, [...] I'm sure I'm weirder than you."⁴⁷³

The girls come from vastly different backgrounds, and have different living circumstances. Imogene was raised on a hippie commune near Jilly's old hometown, has tattoos⁴⁷⁴, and was a "trouble magnet"⁴⁷⁵ at her old school, where she was loosely allied with a rough crowd. Her family has had to worry about money, and she and her brother have had to work to contribute to the household.⁴⁷⁶ Maxine lives with her mother, who is well off but extremely controlling, and pressures her daughter to succeed in school at the expense of everything else.⁴⁷⁷ The girls prove to be good for each other: Imogene gives Maxine the practical means and the moral support to loosen up and have some fun, and Maxine gives Imogene the steadying influence she needs to stay out of trouble.

Imogene, like the biker Blue in *Moonheart* and Raylene by the end of *The Onion Girl*, works hard to overcome a troubled past, but still carries a latent capacity for harm. In all three cases, the characters form social ties that prevent them from returning to their old ways, but their capacity for violence is useful in certain situations--for Blue, when he is

⁴⁷² de Lint, *The Blue Girl* 5.

⁴⁷³ Ibid. 6.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. 26.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. 15.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. 27.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. 29.

fighting the tragg'a in the Otherworld, for Raylene when Jilly calls on her to fight the imago of their older brother, and for Imogene when, on the night when she and Maxine must have their final battle with the *anamithim*, she runs into Brent, a football player who has been bullying her, and discovers that he has been beating up his girlfriend, a cheerleader who has also been bullying her.⁴⁷⁸ When Brent knocks Imogene down, "Adrenaline kicks in, and my brain just explodes with all the months I've had to put up with him [...]; all the fear I have about these soul-eaters in the shadows; how I've tried to just be a normal kid, but nothing will let me."⁴⁷⁹ She knifes him, beats him up, and takes his girlfriend to the hospital⁴⁸⁰, explaining to the girl, "I believe we're all here to look out for each other, even when the other's a person like you. If I didn't help you, I wouldn't be able to respect myself."⁴⁸¹ Her treatment of the girl shows remarkable generosity of spirit; however, when she does finally face down the *anamithim*, the earlier encounter colours her interactions, and when they become corporeal, she is ready to kill them.

Maxine has carefully researched the *anamithim*, and been told, "If the *anamithim* should grab hold of your friend, you have to grab hold of her, too. And whatever they do to her, whatever they change her into, you can't let go."⁴⁸² Maxine has to talk Imogene out of using her knife on the *anamithim*, saying the Imogene she knows would not do that.⁴⁸³ Imogene reflects, "I'm not entirely sure she's right. I dealt harshly with Brent. I never stopped to think about it. I just cut him and then left him to bleed."⁴⁸⁴ But then she realizes, "I'll have to carry the weight of what I've done, and the worst-case outcome of

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. 285.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. 285.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. 286.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. 291.

⁴⁸² Ibid. 233.

⁴⁸³ Ibid. 321.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. 321.

killing the *anamithim* will be that the Imogene I've been trying to be, the one that Maxine considers her friend, won't exist anymore. If she ever did."⁴⁸⁵ It is scrappy Imogene whose struggle is to back down from the *anamithim*, and retiring Maxine whose struggle is to stand up to them. In effect, the *anamithim* do change Imogene--momentarily--into something terrible, and Maxine does not let go.

The climax of *The Blue Girl* highlights a clash between moral wrong--the prospect of violence--and mythical evil--the *anamithim*. Recall that in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, the Belgariad, and the Fionavar Tapestry, actions that would otherwise be morally wrong are justified if they are committed against it; and that in *Spirits in the Wires*, de Lint presents a similar choice. In that instance, Christiana's hesitation before killing the Leviathan's body is an indication of the increased moral complexity of de Lint's work. In the case of Maxine, Imogene, and the *anamithim*, there are good arguments in support of Imogene using violence against the *anamithim*. From one perspective, the choice is a very simple one. But applying the ethics that de Lint's work argues for--the interconnectedness of all things, in light of which Imogene cannot simply kill other creatures without being affected, and the recognition of the personhood of magical creatures, which suggests that the *anamithim* can be treated as something more than mindless appetites--demands a third way.

viii) Aaran Goldstein, Rabedy Collins, and Adrian Dumbrell

These three relatively minor characters from different books represent similar dynamics--bullied boys who do something wrong and then spend the rest of their

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. 322.

respective novels attempting to atone--and their redemptions shed further light on the moral landscape of de Lint's fiction.

Aaran, as mentioned, commissions the virus that disrupts the Wordwood, as revenge on Saskia Madding; Rabedy is part of the bogan gang that murders Anwatan, a cervia woman, nearly provoking a war between the Cousins and the fairy courts; and Adrian is a ghost who, distressed that Imogene refuses to believe he was led to his death by fairies, asks the fairies to make Imogene notice them, which in turn encourages the *anamithim* to notice *her*. All of them turn out to be sympathetic characters, but their actions cause harm.

As sorry as each of them is, he is not capable of atoning for his actions alone. All three require the help of people who would not be faulted for refusing them. Aaran's biggest defender to Saskia's friends is Suzi, an envoy of the Wordwood. Adrian twice requests the help of John Narraway, a man who helps ghosts cross to the other side--first to discover how the *anamithim* can be stopped, and second to cross over when they have been defeated, even though he said after the first encounter, "[D]on't call me again, Adrian. Not even if you change your mind about this and decide to go on like you should have done in the first place. Someone else can help you cross over."⁴⁸⁶ Rabedy seeks out the ghost of Anwatan herself, and proposes to offer himself as a sacrifice to maintain the peace.⁴⁸⁷ She counters, "If I have my way, your punishment will be to live with knowing how you stood aside while evil was done. It's not a mistake you'll make again."⁴⁸⁸ For all three characters, then, redemption requires the co-operation of characters who have done nothing wrong and could reasonably refuse to help them. This constitutes another piece of de Lint's

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. 202.

⁴⁸⁷ de Lint, *Widdershins* 377.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. 379.

argument for the recognition of connections, but it is also a powerful argument against retributive models of justice.

However, lest anyone think that de Lint makes things too easy for sympathetic characters who do harm, for all of these characters, atonement means drastic change--not just a change in behaviour or outlook, but a change in ontological status. Adrian moves on to an undescribed afterlife; Aaran becomes the Webmaster of Wordwood; Rabedy becomes a dog, under the tutelage of Honey, a pit bull rescued from an abusive master.

ix) The Cousins

The Cousins are a very large group, but only a few appear as major characters in *The Onion Girl* and *Widdershins*. Whiskey Jack, Nanabozho, Joseph "Crazy Dog" Animandeg, and Coyote--Jack, Bo, Joe, and Cody--work at solving the mystery of the dead unicorns in *The Onion Girl*, and Joe, who knows Jilly from Newford, keeps tabs on her as she wanders through the Otherworld. In *Widdershins*, they are joined by Whiskey Grey. Grey is actually one of the Corbae clan, a grey jay. Canids and corbae have a longstanding feud, but they have similar interests in *Widdershins*, and get along at least well enough to be virtually indistinguishable from each other.

The Cousins, taken as a group, are an assemblage of Trickster figures whose chief function is to gently mock each other, exchange cigarettes, and talk about the big picture--a sort of Greek chorus. They uncover and convey information, Joe carries Jilly's injured body back from the Otherworld, and in *Widdershins* they do their best to broker peace between the fairy courts and the Cervids, but they seem to have very few struggles or dilemmas of

their own. Very often they articulate the tension between the desire for swift and definite justice and acknowledgement that violence is harmful. Joe, a corbae/canid hybrid and the most pacific of them, says in *The Onion Girl*:

One of my failings, at least so far as most of the other canids are concerned, is that I like to find solutions that aren't quite so final. I can be as hard as need be when push comes to shove, but I figure violence never really solves anything. You kill someone, then maybe you've solved one problem, but you're carrying the burden of that killing around with you for the rest of your days. Kill enough and there's no room left inside for your spirit to grow anymore. All you are is a burden, a stunted spirit, going through the motion of living.⁴⁸⁹

The above is fairly representative of the sorts of things that Cousins say. They are wise, logical, and intimately familiar with the workings of the Otherworld, and their commentary serves as a guide to the moral landscapes of the texts in which they appear.

As a group of parahumans who have their own social structure, their own affinity groups, and members who have occasionally fraught relationships with the groups purported to be their own, de Lint's depiction of the Cousins marks a progression in the portrayal of magical people from that typically found in high fantasy. More attention is paid to making them complex characters with their own social structures than Tolkien paid to orcs or even elves--indeed, more than de Lint paid to previous depictions of magical

⁴⁸⁹ de Lint, *The Onion Girl* 214.

people in *Moonheart*. However, that de Lint creates them in the image of Indigenous People is a problem.

In *Widdershins*, the events surrounding the conflict between the Cousins and the faeries emphasize the value of forgiveness and reconciliation--a problematic concept for a white author to write for Indigenous characters. Although they present a richer version of de Lint's original conception of the Other, with they also perpetuate the stereotype of magical Indigenous People.

In de Lint's books, the journey that protagonists face is not one of weakness to strength, in moral or physical terms, and it is not a process of distinguishing oneself from one's antagonist. Most often, it is a journey towards seeing one's own responsibility for and towards the antagonist; of learning the workings of the world, and using that knowledge to make better decisions. Characters in de Lint's world fare best when they are mindful of the interconnectedness of things, and carefully consider the possible results of their actions. De Lint does not structure his stories, or the universe in which they are set, to *punish* wrongdoing--whether it is intentional or unintentional--but characters do have to face the consequences of their actions, and sometimes that means profound and irreversible change.

De Lint and Race

Because of a fantasy author's ability to create the world of the story, a world may reflect, deliberately or unwittingly, the cultural biases of its author, as well as efforts to

engage with and address those cultural biases. It is important to take note of these biases when considering the moral scheme of a work, particularly in a genre with a history of making evil a matter of "race." In work such as de Lint's, where one's responsibility to the Other is considered, it is worth examining his attitudes to people who have traditionally been othered.

One problem I have raised with de Lint's books is that of cultural appropriation. The Cousins are the most pervasive example. In de Lint's fiction, magic is more readily found among Indigenous People, the Romany, and African-American people. It is possible that he does meticulous research on cultures in which consensus reality involves the supernatural, and that the people of colour in his books are acquainted with magic largely because most of the people in his books are acquainted with magic. But characters such as Bojo, a Romany man, and Robert Lonnie, a Black blues guitarist, are often the only representatives of their respective cultural groups in any given novel, and their ability to speak authoritatively about the Otherworld gives the illusion that de Lint thinks there is something magical about people of colour.

Christine Mains points out that de Lint himself is aware of the problems of possible cultural appropriation in the afterword to *Mulengro*, a novel about Romany culture:

[D]e Lint spoke of his own concern about the appropriation of other cultures' stories and traditions, his desire to continue to 'tell a good story' but still 'approach cultural and sexual differences with respect' and honesty to avoid spreading stereotypes. Rather than surrendering to the impossibility of speaking as Other, of setting limits to the creative force, de Lint attempts to use that power to change the way that

people think about difference, to provoke readers to contemplate how the world could be and how their own community might be transformed.⁴⁹⁰

Mains says that de Lint's authority to write about Indigenous North American culture alongside Celtic culture comes from "a sense of national identity, an expression of his commitment to Canada as a multicultural community."⁴⁹¹ She writes:

The concern about appropriation, about speaking for or as Other, rests to some extent on the perception of an authentic cultural tradition, frozen in the unrecoverable past, a pure indigenous culture forever unchanged except by the harmful moment of colonial encounter. Such a perception denies the force of reciprocity, denies a sense of cultural identity to those living in the multicultural present. It is impossible to deny the destructive effects on culture and tradition wrought by the processes of empire building, the loss of language when children are taught to speak only the language of the colonizer, the loss of ritual and spiritual beliefs due to enforced conversion. But to assume that language and ritual would have remained always the same is to deny the ongoing impact on all cultures throughout history, the constant exchange of trade and travel and tales as well as invasion and enslavement.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ Christine Mains, "Old World, New World, Otherworld: Celtic and Native American Influences in Charles de Lint's *Moonheart* and *Forests of the Heart*," *Extrapolation* 46:3 (2008): 339.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. 340.

⁴⁹² Ibid. 343-344.

The problem with these assertions is that Celtic peoples and indigenous North American peoples are not equivalent. Both groups may have been targeted by Anglo-Saxon culture for genocide or assimilation at various points in their history, but for one of them, *the process is still occurring*. Indigenous North American people must still contend with a dominant culture that frames them as mystical beings of the past and appropriates aspects of their cultures while still denying them full equality under the law. Under these circumstances, cultural appropriation is a further act of oppression, and to refrain from it is not to tell Indigenous People that they must remain frozen in the past forever, but to let them set the terms of their own representation.

Laurence Steven adds, of *Moonheart*:

New fantasy, in its intermingling of realism and the other world, in its penchant for allowing both supernatural and psychological interpretations of happenings to co-exist ambiguously, allows writers such as [...] de Lint to register the voices of the strange Gods, even if they are not finally addressed to them; and it also allows them to speak back, or alongside. It may not be a full communion with the Native spirit of place in Canada (seeking such fullness may, according to commentators such as [Homi] Bhabha and Diana Brydon [...], be a largely white, European prejudice anyway; the fallacy of authenticity), but it is also clearly neither assimilation of Native to Western nor imposition of Western onto Native. It is a third thing, a relationship with a peculiarly Canadian spirit of combined inquisitiveness and tentativeness.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ Steven, 70.

De Lint may be embracing a Canadian multiculturalism that may in turn seek to embrace Indigenous Canadians, but Indigenous Canadians deserve to be asked whether, and under what terms, they want to be embraced, and a “third thing” that is constructed by the dominant culture, from their imagined voices, is suspect. Mains’ argument that indigenous North American people were not monolithic, and therefore cannot have any one person speak for them, does not support the conclusion that one of the people to speak for them should be a white man.

Sources of Evil

As I have said, in de Lint’s world, it is often more appropriate to talk about antagonism than evil. It is not too much of a stretch to use “evil” in some cases, but de Lint rarely does. Del Carter is one exception, and even there, White Deer Woman presses Jilly to entertain the possibility that the truth might be more complicated than that, saying, “[S]urely he wasn’t born bad either? You said yourself that no one is.”⁴⁹⁴ Jilly’s brother looms large and destructive in her mind, but that version of him is her own creation. Even the ostensibly most uncomplicated evil, in de Lint’s universe, fades the harder one looks at it.

Although it may seem counterintuitive to consider the category of natural evil in stories of the supernatural, some of the evils that characters face best fit into the category of natural evil. Just as lions or hurricanes or bacilli can take lives and cause untold

⁴⁹⁴ de Lint, *The Onion Girl*, 433.

suffering simply by being what they are and doing what they do, sometimes in the works of de Lint and other fantasy authors magical beings, without malevolent intent, cause harm to humans. The Leviathan, the creature whose very embodiment threatens the Wordwood in *Spirits in the Wires*, is one such creature. The *anamithim* in *Blue Girl* are others. These latter are of particular interest, because they are sentient beings for whom humans are legitimate prey. This is a moral struggle that is most often played out in vampire novels--perhaps working through anxieties about animal welfare, animal rights, and movement towards ethically sourced food--and the common response is for characters to develop an ethics of consumption.⁴⁹⁵ Imogene's best friend Maxine's triumph over the *anamithim* stems from her ability to appeal to those ethics:

'Are you ready to hear the terms of your survival?' she asks. [...] 'If we let you go,' Maxine says, 'you leave us alone. You leave us and our families and friends and anybody we know or might come to know alone. In other words, it'll be like you never were a part of our lives and you never will me.'

'And...and in exchange?'

Oh, I can tell he had trouble getting that out.

'You get to live,' she tells him. [...]

'You have a bargain,' he says.

I shake my head. 'Maxine, how are we supposed to trust these things?' [...]

'You question our word?' he demands. [...]

⁴⁹⁵ Katri Lehtinen, "Twentieth-Century Vampire Literature: Intimations of Evil and Power," *This Thing of Darkness: Perspectives on Evil and Human Wickedness*, eds. Margaret Söner Breen and Richard Paul Hamilton (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), 9.

‘Well, yeah,’ I say. ‘Maybe you’re some big important guy where you come from, but here you’re just an ugly monster that came gunning after us for no good reason that I can see. That doesn’t make you particularly trustworthy in my book.’

The leader turns his attention on Pelly. ‘Tell them,’ he says. ‘Tell them how our word is our bond.’

‘It’s...it’s true,’ Pelly says when I look at him. [...] ‘Across the borders, one’s word is one’s only currency.’⁴⁹⁶

Arguably, the brownies whose malicious tricks killed Imogene and Maxine’s fellow student Adrian are another example of natural evil, if such an argument can be made without negating their personhood. Imogene’s imaginary friend Pelly tells her that fairies are not evil; “Most of us just *are*. And the ones you might consider evil aren’t so much that as amoral. They don’t see right or wrong the way we do. I don’t know if they see a difference at all.”⁴⁹⁷ This would suggest that the differences between brownies and humans are more cultural; however, Pelly later adds:

They *become* amoral. Those fairies were probably once house spirits, brownies of some sort. Maybe bodachs, or hobs. Their job, their reason for being, is to keep a place tidy. But they need direction, from an older brownie or a hob, like a Billy Blind, or from the mistress of the building. Without that, they can go...wrong. [...] It’s like making homemade bread[.] Baked just right, from goodly ingredients, it can

⁴⁹⁶ de Lint, *Blue Girl*, 322-324.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid. 169.

be the best loaf you've ever tasted. But leave that same loaf alone long enough, and it becomes moldy and it will make you sick if you eat it.⁴⁹⁸

If the results of the neglect of the brownies are indeed like bread mold, then it is fair to argue that their occasional maliciousness is a natural evil. If, on the other hand, the neglect is more like other kinds of abuse, then the brownies join the ranks of de Lint characters who have been abused and are responding the best way they know how.

The Leviathan in *Spirits in the Wires*, however, is a different order of being entirely. Vast and terrible, he cannot be bargained with, and even if he could, he has no control over his circumstances. The right thing to do in his case is entirely dependent on Christiana's understanding of what is appropriate to the Wordwood, and in this case, after some tense moral agonizing, she concludes that it is the exact opposite of what would be appropriate for a human being.⁴⁹⁹ Instances of natural evil such as the Leviathan defy a solution through moral means, but neither are they depicted as malevolent. People have a duty to treat them ethically just as humans have a duty to treat the forest or the ocean ethically, their potential for danger notwithstanding.

One theme that recurs over and over in de Lint's work, evolving over time, is the doppelgänger. The author appears to find a great deal of narrative possibility in the idea of a version of oneself wreaking havoc. In *Moonheart*, Mal'e'ka is the shadow of the druid Thomas Hengwr. In *Memory and Dream*, Vincent Rushkin has his protégé Giselle copy the numena painting that brought over John Sweetgrass, and the copy, Bitterweed, is a hostile and violent man who is repeatedly mistaken for John. Fortunately, those who know John

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid. 170.

⁴⁹⁹ de Lint, *Spirits in the Wires*, 386-387.

well mistake one for the other only at a distance. Rushkin himself is not Rushkin, but the murderous rogue numena of Rushkin's self-portrait. When Jilly is hit by a car and Raylene destroys her paintings in *Onion Girl*, her friends are bewildered to have seen someone they think is Jilly herself. Even Imogene, in *The Blue Girl*, struggles with two versions of herself: the current version, friend to Maxine, and the past version, a tough girl spoiling for a fight.

In de Lint's earlier books, doppelgängers are always antagonistic. There is indeed something nightmarish about the prospect of having an evil twin, about being held responsible for the actions of another over which one has no control. An ethos that stresses connection intensifies this, both because it is a fraught kind of connection and because it raises the possibility of carefully cultivated connections being broken through no fault of one's own. Mal'e'ka, Rushkin, and Bitterweed are monsters who must be destroyed in the manner befitting fantasy villains. But in the later books, *The Onion Girl* and *Widdershins*, Jilly makes peace with her darker versions of herself, chiefly by loving them and trusting them. And in *Spirits in the Wires* and *Widdershins*, Christiana Tree is a major protagonist.

If one is--as de Lint appears to be--struggling to find an antagonist that is fair game, the self (as Ursula Le Guin showed in *A Wizard of Earthsea*) is a safe choice that removes any prospect of demonizing the other. On the other hand, demonizing the self carries its own perils; in a universe designed to celebrate connection, it is not an appropriate relationship. Christiana Tree, a shadow self that is not monstrous, stands as a sort of course correction.

A third type of antagonism arises when characters make free choices with harmful results. One of the roots of harmful choices is anthropocentrism, which blinds characters

to the personhood of non-humans. Beginning in *Memory and Dream*, magical characters exhibit a degree of anxiety about how *real* they are--how real or how human. Although it remains a thread in virtually all of de Lint's subsequent novels, only in *Memory and Dream* is it a source of antagonism. Vincent Rushkin justifies his devouring of the numena by arguing to Isabelle that they are not people unless endowed with a piece of the soul of their creator. Later he thinks to himself, "But the numena were really only sustenance, nothing more. In this he hadn't lied: it took a piece of the soul of their maker to make numena equal to humans and who would be fool enough to do such a thing? Let the creatures run one's errands. Let them remain food."⁵⁰⁰ But John Sweetgrass tells Isabelle, "Maybe we already are real in the sense that you mean [...] because you gave us your unconditional love. Those of us that Rushkin brought across were denied that love and that's why they're so hungry. They need what he can never give them, what you gave us freely without ever thinking about it."⁵⁰¹

Of course, Rushkin himself is one of the numena: he feeds off the others in order to stay alive. This frames his chauvinism in a different light--as self-hatred and self-doubt, and a tendency to regard his fellow magical creatures as locked in a pseudoDarwinian competition for survival.

But the potential for harm that this viewpoint carries with it is not limited to the principal antagonist. Cosette, another of Isabelle's numena, is endowed with a Peter-Pan-ish amorality, but is usually loving and eager to please--however, in one instance, her disbelief in her own reality makes her cruelly indifferent to her friends, her maker, and even her own safety. While Cosette is with Isabelle and two friends, imprisoned by

⁵⁰⁰ Charles de Lint, *Memory and Dream* (New York: Tor, 1994), 517.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. 487-488.

Rushkin in a dangerous and largely deserted part of Newford, she is tasked with carrying a warning that will save her home painting and that of a friend. If the paintings are destroyed, Cosette and her friend Rosalind will cease to exist. But Cosette refuses to leave, because Isabelle is about to commit suicide. She says, “[S]he’s going to free her red crow and I have to see it fly. I have to see, I have to know what she has that I don’t. Why she can dream and bring us across, but I can’t.”⁵⁰² Isabelle is saved, but Cosette’s preoccupation with the idea that she is less real than her creator endangers them both.

Another source of harmful choices, and a recurring theme in de Lint’s work--as it was in much of the popular literature of the 1990s--is child abuse. In many ways, this is, like the self, a safe source of antagonism, because while abusers may be a varied lot, some of whom are more sympathetic than others, the abuse itself is always, by definition, harmful and wrong. But child abusers themselves, being of the mundane world, are never principal antagonists; in de Lint’s work, it is rather characters’ reaction to the abuse that drives the story. Aaran Goldstein, who sets in motion the events of *Spirits in the Wires*, and Adrian, who accidentally sets the *anamithim* on Imogene, have both been bullied in ways that damage their ability to interact with people. Katherine Mully, Isabelle’s best friend in *Memory and Dream*, and Jilly Coppercorn and her sister Raylene, have had the trajectories of their lives altered by sexual abuse, and even though all three make a sustained effort to overcome it, it keeps coming back, eventually resulting in Kathy’s suicide. And also in *Memory and Dream*, abuse allows supernatural evil to get a foothold in our world: Isabelle Copley’s upbringing, and the attached defense mechanisms--not just her ability to edit her

⁵⁰² Ibid. 512.

memory, but her willingness to forgive and return to an abusive and violent man--enable Vincent Rushkin to continue feeding off her numena.

But child abuse is not the only kind of abuse that de Lint deals with in his fiction. In *Moonheart*, the evil Mal'ek'a split off from the druid Thomas Hengwyr when Taliesin imprisoned him in a standing stone for a thousand years, and Tep'fyl'in, one of the spirits, mistrusts all white people because of colonialism. These are characters with legitimate grievances, whose reactions nevertheless place them in the position of antagonists.

In short, de Lint's treatment of abuse is an extension of the idea that magic magnifies and intensifies already-existing connections. De Lint depicts it as a factor in making otherwise sympathetic people behave in destructive, maladaptive, or irrational ways, the consequences of which are intensified by the presence of magic. Moreover, for someone who can manipulate magic, such as Jilly or Raylene, their emotional responses to abuse can become external and manifest.

In de Lint's work, antagonism shares some of the characteristics of Tolkienesque evil as outlined in Chapter 2, but the correspondences draw the reader into more complex moral reasoning. Characters do not struggle against a disembodied elemental force in these books so much as they cope with the results of a dismissive or exploitative attitude towards one's fellow creatures. This attitude is not inherently tempting. It begins to look like a reasonable alternative, however, when characters are under unreasonable duress, and even more so when they have been primed by lives of ill use.

Evil, such as it is in de Lint's books, does not pollute. In the ecological sense, the most that can be said is that pollution is one of the ways in which the dismissive and

exploitative attitudes that de Lint warns against might manifest themselves. In the moral sense, however, de Lint argues against the very concept of pollution. People, places, and landscapes are not tainted by their associations, and arguably, major struggles for many of de Lint's protagonists involve the need to reject the notion that they are polluted by past trauma, past wrongdoing, or their nonstandard ontological status.

Likewise, de Lint complicates the idea that evil can be palpable. Sometimes, as with *Bitterweed* and *Rushkin*, it is accompanied by a vague sense of wrongness; however, *Saskia Madding* evokes the same wrongness, so using such a feeling as the basis for moral judgment is ill-advised.

As with ecological pollution, it is less accurate to say that evil is viciously competitive than that grave moral wrong is the result of circumstances that require people to compete viciously with each other. And dehumanization--or, more accurately, depersonization--is one of the hallmarks of grave moral wrong, but it is also the result of being depersonized.

Conclusions

De Lint's work is not flawless, but it is groundbreaking, and it is plain that he has taken some care with the way he represents antagonism. It is never motiveless; it is never pure evil; it is never located with an entire people or region; it is never really external; rather, it arises from profound differences, from past injustice, or from small woundings made large by magic. The multiplicity, complexity, and ambiguity of the city are illustrative of the multiplicity, complexity, and ambiguity of the moral landscape of de Lint's work:

while there is no absolute evil, and truly malevolent characters are rare aberrations, characters can do great harm through petty malice, thoughtlessness, or even understandable but maladaptive responses to ill-treatment.

In de Lint's fantasies, good and bad are not a matter of allegiances, or even of intentions, but of carefully considering one's responsibilities to others and the impact of one's choices. De Lint uses magic as an intensifier, to make that impact more concrete and immediate than it would otherwise be. He argues, moreover, for an ethics of the imagination: the stories we tell ourselves, in myth or in dreams, have redemptive power, but they can also do harm. Realizing this himself, he has made an effort to correct or modify problematic aspects of the moral landscape of his plots.

Chapter 6: “Mostly it’s a kind of chaos, a place where things are always changing, always dangerous”: Mercedes Lackey

Mercedes Lackey, who has worked in both urban and high fantasy, as well as science fiction, paints a more traditional picture of evil than does de Lint. Where de Lint creates a coherent moral landscape in which connection is valued and wrong results from failures of connection, Lackey’s fiction is far more informed by mythical evil, elemental evil, and essential evil. She explains antagonism by gesturing towards moral wrong, and giving evil hallmarks associated with moral wrong, but ultimately what she calls evil in her work is shaped on one hand by the fears of the implied audience rather than a coherent set of goals or values, and on the other by what she considers to be appropriate actions for her heroes to take in order to vanquish it. It often operates at one remove, through people who ally with it to obtain power, either because they are in disadvantaged positions and systemic injustice denies them mundane power, or because they are in privileged positions and believe that their right to more power trumps the rights of others to exist unmolested.

In some of Lackey’s early works, evil is a matter of allegiance to an evil group such as the Unseleighe Sidhe, but in her later works her definition becomes more functional, even as she develops a moral shorthand that uses sexism and blood sacrifice to signify evil. At the same time, Lackey makes narrative choices that assert that legitimate power lies with policing authorities, which in her work are selected by the forces that govern the universe.

Lackey’s career began several years later than de Lint’s, making her an early adopter of the urban fantasy genre, but she produces novels in very different circumstances from de

Lint, and these circumstances arguably have an impact on the moral landscape of her novels. Even while Lackey works to maintain a more traditional view of evil in her urban fantasies, it must be carefully negotiated in an urban setting.

Context and Reception

Lackey is one of the most prolific fantasy authors working today, releasing a novel roughly every three months. John Clute concludes his *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* entry on Lackey by writing, “There is no real doubt that ML writes too fast and too much; despite the active strength of her mind, despite the number of issues she effectively addresses ([feminism] being perhaps paramount), and despite the thrust of the story in her best works, her prose fails, time and time again, to realize the virtues that spring onto the careless page.”⁵⁰³ Although some early critical attention was given to Lackey’s high fantasies, particularly in terms of gender politics, there is a dearth of critical material concerning her work. Lackey’s writing has indeed declined in terms of nuance and the multidimensionality of the characters since she began releasing four books a year, but her breakneck pace has led to her developing a kind of moral shorthand to distinguish heroes from villains in a complex world, and this shorthand is worth examining more closely as a cultural barometer.

Moreover, perhaps because as the only American author in this study she walks a careful tightrope between American fan culture and a conservative religious and political climate, or because she has had difficulties with her fans, Lackey performs a different sort

⁵⁰³ John Clute, “Lackey, Mercedes,” *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, eds. John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), 554.

of negotiation with her audience from that performed by de Lint, Armstrong, or Miéville. Although, like de Lint, she does adjust the moral landscape of her work in order to discourage definitions of evil that she acknowledges as problematic, she also performs these adjustments with the apparent goal of overdetermining how readers will interpret her work.

Like de Lint, she devotes long passages and sometimes entire chapters to the points of view of a story's antagonists--characters who, in Lackey's work, it is appropriate to call evil. At variance with de Lint, especially in his later novels, the psychology of these characters is rather more opaque. They enjoy being evil, and offer up motives that sound plausible only if one accepts at the outset that they are thoroughly bad people. Morally ambivalent characters do surface, but they are always converted to goodness sooner or later.

Lackey writes a number of urban fantasy series, most of them loosely linked. For this chapter, I have examined at least one book from each of these contemporary series, and three novels from the *Bedlam's Bard* series, as it is Lackey's longest running urban fantasy series. Through these it is possible to see how her ideas about evil have changed over the years, particularly in response to 9/11. The progression of her work is towards support for a definition of evil that combines and conflates the mythical and the functional, and for the very systems that urban fantasy tends to question. Paradoxically, as her writings have evinced more and more conservatism, her portrayals of evil have become increasingly complex--as if she still wishes to show the reader evil, but must go to greater and greater lengths to find it.

Construction of the Worlds: Diana Tregarde, SERRA, and Bedlam's Bard

The Diana Tregarde novels, the SERRA novels, and the Bedlam's Bard series are set in the same universe, and loosely linked, with shared characters who occasionally encounter each other in passing. In *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows*, however, Eric Banyon, the series' protagonist, also makes sneering mention of "fantasy schlock [...] like telepathic horses, or ancient Aztec gods invading Dallas"⁵⁰⁴ These are references to Lackey's own novels, the Valdemar series and *Burning Water*, one of the Diana Tregarde novels.

The world in which the novels are set is apparently meant to be the real world. There are a scattering of pop culture references in the novels, and *Mad Maudlin*, one of the novels set in New York City, weaves the aftermath of 9/11 into the plot. However, in *Spirits White as Lightning*, a Bedlam's Bard novel not included in this study⁵⁰⁵, the elf Korendil tells Beth, "There are worlds as real as your own, places in the World Above, where there are no Node Groves, no Portals, and no Elfhfames. Such worlds are difficult to read, and easy to become lost in forever, nor does magic work so well in such worlds as it does here."⁵⁰⁶ There is, here, the suggestion that the reader's world might be such a place, but it is only a suggestion, and this is the only reference to it. The introduction of such a notion constitutes one of the above-mentioned instances of negotiation with the audience. It might be a recognition, by Lackey, that some of her early claims about the efficacy of Wiccan magic are untenable; it might also be her defense against a subset of the population that she claims takes her work far too seriously. At any rate, with some exceptions that

⁵⁰⁴ Mercedes Lackey and Ellen Guon, *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* (Riverdale NY: Baen, 1990), 65.

⁵⁰⁵ But consulted for context.

⁵⁰⁶ Mercedes Lackey and Rosemary Edghill, *Spirits White as Lightning* (Riverdale NY: Baen, 2001), 328.

likely stem from development over time and fine-tuning, the rules of the magical and supernatural dimension of the world Lackey has created are consistent.

In the earlier novels, witches such as Diana Tregarde and Beth Kentraine use apparently Wiccan spells to perform far stronger magic than that to which actual Wiccans are generally accustomed. They are able to sense magical energy and manipulate it, with the strong implication that this ability runs in families. Sorcerers and sorceresses, on the other hand, cannot sense magic and have no special talent for it, and must rely on the mechanics of their spells alone:

A witch worked with natural balances, rather like a t'ai chi master in that way. If you attacked a witch, if the odds, power levels, and skills were equal, chances were you'd find your own attack turned back against you. [...]

A sorcerer ignored those balances. A sorcerer worked with or against the grain; it didn't much matter. Partially that was because an awful lot of the kind of people who became sorcerers were pretty weak in the psionics department. They couldn't sense the natural flows in the first place.

And the kind of person who became a sorcerer also tended to be a manipulator. That wasn't in and of itself a bad thing, provided your motives were reasonably unselfish. Sorcery was a matter of dominances; your will over the material world, your mind over the wills of others, and ultimately, if the sorcerer was skilled enough, the dominance of the master over slaves created or invoked. Again, that wasn't of itself a bad thing; some magickal critters were only under

control when they *were* enslaved, and the sorcerer in question did not need to be the one who had invoked them to be the one who controlled them.

You could--as Di *had*--control them right back to where they came from.⁵⁰⁷

Witchcraft, in other words, is both a religion and a fact of biology that works in harmony with its magical environment, while sorcery blindly relies on magical technologies, and tends to attract a certain kind of personality.⁵⁰⁸ Although Diana does both, Lackey implies a hierarchy in which sorcery carries more potential for evil because it involves unnatural domination. It is illustrative of Lackey's conception of power, as the rightful province of certain elites, that Diana is able to use sorcery legitimately.

Lackey's invented universes are more explicitly moral than de Lint's, so sorcery makes use of karma, as well. In *Jinx High*, Diana tells Deke Kestrel's father, "[...] I'll wager that it wasn't too long ago that he lost the protection of innocence, too. He's got that look--like he's started *knowingly* violating laws and rules, and doing it in a way he knows is going to hurt people if they find out."⁵⁰⁹ This makes Deke fair game for magical predators. And the sorceress, Fay, gloats over a fundamentalist Christian couple who runs a local fast-food outlet:

[T]his one was franchised and run by a bunch of born-again bigots, and it always gave her a little thrill to eat there. After all, here she was, the Scarlet Woman, the

⁵⁰⁷ Mercedes Lackey, *Jinx High* (New York: Tom Doherty & Associates, 2006), 112.

⁵⁰⁸ It's possible to argue for a gendered interpretation of this, given the then-still-popular association of women with nature and men with technology, but both Lackey and the sorcerer she fights are female. Also noteworthy is the idea that some kinds of creatures *need* to be enslaved, a more disturbing aspect of the biologically mandated hierarchy that Lackey seems to support.

⁵⁰⁹ Lackey, *Jinx High* 69. Note the implication that following the rules is a form of goodness.

Enemy, smiling and feeding her face right under their noses. They took her money, and never guessed what she was. And she would use the money to carry misfortune to them, making certain that something went wrong after she was ready to leave.

It was too pathetically easy, really, but it was such fun--they were opening themselves to her so thoroughly that she *always* had an opportunity to make them miserable. Their karmic balance sheets would be constantly in the red if only for the way they treated their employees. That they cheated on their taxes and quietly hated their fellow man (in the form of anyone who didn't belong to *their* little fundamentalist sect), all the while professing to love their neighbors--that only made it easier. Hypocritical liars that they were, they were ripe for her tampering.⁵¹⁰

This concept of karma, however, is not raised again in this universe⁵¹¹, and it is easy to see why. For one thing, in the practical life of an author, it would mean that over the course of a series, complicated karmic balance sheets would have to be kept for each character. It would also mean that no tragedy could befall a character without its being deserved. For another, karma implies a just universe, but a universe where--as I will show--good people are surrounded by evil enemies and must be eternally vigilant would seem to be a hostile universe, and the two cannot be easily reconciled.

A third kind of human magic, Bardic magic, allows its practitioners to see and manipulate magic in the form of music or art. It is inborn, but can be honed through training and practice, and Lackey uses the character of bard Eric Banyon as an object lesson

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. 92.

⁵¹¹ It does resurface in *The Wizard of London*, now targeted at magicians specifically.

in the value of self-discipline. Bards are highly valued among the Sidhe, and can travel freely between warring territories. The idea of people being born with natural gifts and then trained to positions that make them exceptions to the rules is a recurring one in Lackey's work.

Humans share America--and Europe--with the Sidhe, who predate Columbus by several centuries, having fled Europe to escape the encroachment of Cold Iron. Although there are many kinds of Sidhe, the most frequently encountered are elves. The Sidhe have their own realm, Underhill, but their enclaves, or hames, appear to exist in pockets linked to geographical locations on Earth. These locations are typically home to both groves of trees and to magical nodes, and to disrupt either one is to threaten the hame.

The Sidhe also have magic, but no capacity for creativity. They can appreciate the products of creativity, and they can alter and improve existing works, but cannot, themselves, create⁵¹², Because of this lack of creativity, elves are dependent on human culture--not just for entertainment, but for survival. Without it, they enter a state of stagnation called Dreaming, and this can be fatal.⁵¹³ At the same time, humans make extensive use of Cold Iron, making human communities and especially cities dangerous for elves. In one of their first encounters, Korendil tells Eric Banyon that most of the elves in Los Angeles have fallen prey to Dreaming:

⁵¹² Lackey and Guon, *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* 215.

⁵¹³ A running joke in *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* is that they can duplicate money, but all of the bills have the same serial number, although it is hard to make the case that the changing of a single number is beyond the abilities of an intelligent species capable of interacting with human beings and indeed of "passing."

‘It is a state,’ he said, finally. ‘A state in which only “now” is important. There is no memory of the past, or thought of the future. All that matters is existence and amusement.’

‘Sounds like half the kids hanging out at the malls,’ Eric replied, uncomfortably aware that Korendil was describing something very like his own life.

‘And that *is* where you find them,’ Korendil said, nodding. ‘In the malls. What little magic they have left to them, they use to help steal what they want. Things of amusement, entertainment, and clothing that catches their fancy. *Surely* you have seen them, and yet never noticed them, nor noticed that they are not to be seen outside of your malls.’⁵¹⁴

Thus, the Sidhe are both dependent on and threatened by human civilization, and particularly urban environments. Likewise, when Eric is shown a vision of what the world would be like without the Sidhe, he sees a bleak, crime-ridden urban wasteland. Much later, in *Mad Maudlin*, the elf Inigo Moonlight makes explicit the interdependency between humans and Sidhe, saying, “‘Each supplies what the other lacks. Though woe betide he, Sidhe or human, who tries to take it for himself.’”⁵¹⁵ Despite this interdependency, the existence of the Sidhe is largely a secret. Seleighe Court Sidhe often intervene in the lives of individual humans, most often children and teens, to make their lives better, but when their work is done they charm away all memory of themselves. In *Beyond World's End*, the Guardians who magically protect New York City initially have no inkling that the Sidhe exist.

⁵¹⁴ Lackey and Guon, *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* 65.

⁵¹⁵ Mercedes Lackey and Rosemary Edghill, *Mad Maudlin* (Riverdale NY: Baen, 2003) 177.

Given that urban fantasy and its critics have often used relationships between mundane humans and magical people to talk about relationships between the dominant culture and marginalized or colonized cultures, it is not unreasonable to regard Lackey's Sidhe in this light, by which one sees that the Sidhe are unacknowledged but necessary contributors to Western culture. The comparison becomes both more illuminating and more problematic, however, with the suggestion that the Sidhe are gifted with magic rather than individual creativity, and the idea that they love (Western) human culture, and will lapse into stasis without exposure to it, both charges traditionally aimed at tribal cultures.

Although several of the novels featuring the Sidhe deal with the Seleighe Court exclusively, the Sidhe are divided into the Seleighe Court and Unseleighe Court. In the novels from the early nineties, these are unambiguously good and evil respectively. The Bedlam's Bard series returns, however, in 2000, and the Unseleighe Court is a more nuanced body, as will be discussed further on. The Seleighe Court is also divided into High Court and Low Court Elves, the latter of whom are more mischievous, flightier, and tied to their groves.⁵¹⁶ This is a precedent for the natural hierarchies that will later emerge among humans--the natural superiority of the Guardians, for example.

Although they ostensibly take place in the same universe, there are marked differences between the Sidhe in the SERRA novels and the Sidhe in the Bedlam's Bard novels. One is the Unseleighe Sidhe's attitude towards children; another is the degree of inventiveness that elves are allowed before it is considered actual creativity. (Recall that changing the serial number on a bill is more than the elves of *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* can do; in *Born to Run*, however, they are filmmakers.) Finally, in *Born to Run* the Sidhe,

⁵¹⁶ Lackey and Guon, *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* 64.

both Seleighe and Unseleighe, need to earn money to function outside of Underhill, while in the Bedlam's Bard universe, the Sidhe are a source of inexhaustible wealth.

In addition to humans, the elves, and creatures aligned with one or the other of the Sidhe courts, there are other sentient species that either share the world with humans or reside on other planes. Examples of these are Greystone the Gargoyle from the Bedlam's Bard novels, the shapeshifting trickster Foxtrot X-Ray from *Born to Run* (who is in the later novels *Spirits White as Lightning* and *Chrome Circle* revealed to be a Japanese fox-spirit called a kitsune), the vampire Andre LeBrel, and Chinthliss the Dragon. On the one hand, Lackey makes it clear that these are full people, deserving of respect and dignity. On the other, they and a great many of the Sidhe are not granted the same complexity as the protagonists, and Eric Banyon is not above using Greystone as a litmus test for visitors.⁵¹⁷ In light of this, Lackey's representation of parahuman characters is not much more advanced than Tolkien's.

There are also gods in this universe, although they tend to be small and territorial, and are confined to the Diana Tregarde Investigations. Occasionally superlative Sidhe will be worshipped, as well, by humans who do not understand them.⁵¹⁸ There are also references to higher power or powers that maintain justice in the universe, the least oblique of these references concerning the fate of Jeanette Campbell:

Jeanette Campbell had been an outlaw chemist, creator of the drug T-6/157-- known as T-stroke--that had been responsible for hundreds of deaths in the city last

⁵¹⁷ Mercedes Lackey and Rosemary Edghill, *Beyond World's End* (Riverdale NY: Baen, 2001), 257.

⁵¹⁸ These include the Bronze-Age humans who worship Aerete the Golden in *Spirits White as Lightning* and the street children who call upon Rionne ferch Riantan as Bloody Mary and the Blue Lady.

spring before she'd been dragged off Underhill to serve the Unseleighe Sidhe Aerune mac Audelaine. Poisoned by her own creation, and faced with the choice between dying and going to Hell or staying in the world to try to make amends somehow for the wrongs she'd done, she'd elected to be bonded to Hosea's banjo until she had made reparations for the damage she had done in life--in effect, haunting it.⁵¹⁹

Although Lackey's work involves several sympathetic Christian characters (among them, bard Hosea Songmaker), the cosmos she describes in her work is not explicitly Judeo-Christian; in fact, the universe appears to most closely reflect the beliefs of the Wiccan characters. However, no one in the text itself questions the idea of Hell, or that Campbell would go there. There is also a Heaven, and apparently something approximating a Purgatory. When the newly dead Russ Canfield asks *Born to Run* protagonist Tannim Drake if there is a Heaven, Tannim replies, "[...] I don't know what your definition of Heaven is, so I can't say. But I will tell you that not everyone who dies waltzes through the 'Pearly Gates' of their choice; they still have things to do."⁵²⁰ When humans die, one of the other possible options available to them is a spirit world, in which one plane is the world they knew, full of living humans, and the other is entirely the province of ghosts and non-corporeal creatures. Ghosts with unfinished business are given an opportunity to sort themselves out.⁵²¹

The universe that Lackey's characters inhabit is fraught with danger, but it also dispenses justice on a cosmic level. Beyond the one small karmic blip for Diana Tregarde, the innocent are not shielded from harm, but those who are victims of their circumstances,

⁵¹⁹ Lackey and Edghill, *Mad Maudlin* 18.

⁵²⁰ Lackey and Dixon, *Born to Run* 11-12.

⁵²¹ Ibid. 9-13.

including antagonists, have ample opportunities for reform. Jeannette Campbell can expiate her crimes in Hosea's banjo, half-Sidhe Ria Llewellyn's broken body is healed so that she can undo her father's dirty work, and Eric Banyon gets a second chance to be a twenty-something student at Julliard, this time with unlimited resources. These second chances, however, are not offered to all, the implication being that some people are irredeemable and the powers that govern the universe will not even waste their energy in an attempt.

Construction of the Worlds: Elemental Masters

The Elemental Masters series is constructed along different lines. These novels are set in England (and in at least one case America), in a time period spanning from the late Victorian era to the aftermath of World War I. In this universe, magic is structured by the four elements--Water, Earth, Air, and Fire. Each element can be used for good or evil, and has good and evil creatures associated with it. Moreover, each one of Lackey's novels set in this universe is a very loose retelling of a different fairy tale.

The novels are united first by the presence of a few common characters (although these are only mentioned as present in the same universe, and do not intrude on each other's stories to any great degree); secondly by a system of Elemental magic, whereby characters display a talent with magic associated with fire, water, air, or earth; and finally by the fairy tales.

The Sidhe exist here, although in the novels prior to *The Wizard of London* there is no indication of their power structures or daily lives, and very little said about their

relationship with humanity. Robin Goodfellow appears here, not as a fully rounded character who happens to belong to another intelligent species, but as a dispenser of justice.

There is an afterlife, and it includes heaven and hell. It also carries with it the possibilities of being a ghost, or in rare cases, going to Faerie. Karma resurfaces, after a fashion, in these novels, although its role is carefully circumscribed. Upperclass magician David Alderscroft reflects:

In Magic, things were different; when you did something knowingly wrong, when you hurt people who did not deserve hurt, it came back on you later. The scales were evened a great deal faster for a Mage than for an ordinary man, who might wait until the day he was called before the Almighty to answer for what he had done.⁵²²

This limits karmic balance to magicians, removing the problem of squaring the book's moral scheme with a reader's understanding of the world while still allowing characters in Lackey's universe to get what they deserve in the course of the plot. Like the redeemable villains of the *Bedlam's Bard/SERRATED Edge/Diana Tregarde* universe, David Alderscroft loses his chance to woo Isabelle Harton, but wins back her friendship when he wins back his soul from Lady Cordelia.

In the *Bedlam's Bard/SERRATED Edge/Diana Tregarde* and *Elemental Masters* universes, there is an ongoing tension in Lackey's efforts to create worlds that in their

⁵²² Lackey, *The Wizard of London* 227.

inclusion of magic and magical beings are even more diverse than the reader's own world, but also simpler and fairer, while still being recognizable *as* the reader's own world. The world of the stories has developed not just to accommodate the need for a more nuanced understanding of the world, but in response to developments in Lackey's own career, particularly to increasing frustration with her fans.

Role of the City

In Lackey's first urban fantasies, as with de Lint's, the city appears to be there for juxtaposition. In *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows*, set in Los Angeles, the elf Korendil is not entirely out of place at the Renaissance Faire, but when elves start turning up in other places--Eric's apartment⁵²³, malls⁵²⁴, a limousine on Van Nuys Boulevard⁵²⁵, animation studios⁵²⁶--the inherent contradiction is keener. Eric visits a nightclub "filled with refugees from Middle Earth[.]"⁵²⁷ In Lackey's early novels, magical battles take place in back alleys, or in *Jinx High*, at a high school prom, and part of the thrill is in the mundane setting.⁵²⁸

⁵²³ Lackey and Guon, *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* 57.

⁵²⁴ Ibid. 65.

⁵²⁵ Ibid. 72.

⁵²⁶ Ibid. 169.

⁵²⁷ Ibid. 79.

⁵²⁸ The covers of those early novels indicate a marketing campaign that bears this out. Tom Kidd's 1990 cover for *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* features the elven king Terenil, with cape and armour, crossing swords with renegade elf Perenor, in a blue business suit, in an alley. Larry Elmore's cover for the first edition of *Born to Run* in 1992 shows a leather-jacketed Tannim crouching to protect a young woman, while he exchanges magical fire with a dark-skinned elven woman in high heels and a tight red dress. In their immediate background is a racing car; behind that, a plane; behind *that*, a hangar--the location of a good portion of the book's climax--and in the distant background, but still prominent, the lights of a city.

The power of juxtaposition fades, however, when a contrast between the things being juxtaposed is no longer recognized. As urban fantasy grew as a genre, magic against an urban backdrop lost its power to shock and tantalize. The covers of later editions of those earlier novels bear this out: Clyde Caldwell's 2007 cover for *Bedlam's Bard*, the omnibus edition containing *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* and its sequel *Summoned to Tourney*, shows Eric, Kory, and Beth with a dragonish creature (the artist's approximation of a Nightflyer, a magical creature whose invasion is the subject matter of *Summoned to Tourney*) looming over

However, unlike de Lint's novels, or, as we will see, China Miéville's novels set in this world, there is less of an invitation, or opportunity, to suggest magical interpretations for mundane occurrences in the reader's own life.

In terms of content, the element of juxtaposition in the twenty-first century Bedlam's Bard novels is much reduced. The principal narrator has just emerged from a significant amount of time in Faerie, and magic is a fact of life for him. Moreover, arguably, American perceptions of the urban environment have changed. American crime rates have steadily fallen from an all-time high in the early nineties, and green space, cultural activities, and transit initiatives are widely--albeit not universally--recognized as making cities more functional. If one of the goals of urban fantasy is to reclaim the city as livable space, there is a sense in which a lot of that initial work has been done. Finally, in terms of reader expectations, the urban fantasy genre is mature enough by this point that "Gee whiz! Elves in the *city*!" will not sustain a novel for any length of time.

them. Kory is in front in elven armour; Eric stands behind him and to one side with his flute; and Beth stands on his other side, even further back, in sunglasses, a dark coat, and a halter top, with a guitar in one hand and a bloody blade in the other. (And, most incongruously, a crucifix around her neck.) Over Beth's shoulder is a faint sketch of city lights. All reference to the city could be obscured by a well-placed thumb; juxtaposition is no longer as much of a selling point. And *Jinx High's* 2006 edition cover, by Hugh Syme, follows the now-established cover protocols of the supernatural-romance-turned-urban-fantasy genre: in the foreground is a realistically rendered slim, pretty, young blond woman in low-cut black jeans and a form-fitting black t-shirt meets the reader's gaze defiantly, with one fist clenched, and the other hand upturned under something that looks very much like a bright star on the edge of a nebula. Behind her is a more roughly rendered, sepia-toned forest, with an indistinct human figure either fleeing, attacking, or thrown off his/her feet.

The Stephen Hickman covers for the first three twenty-first-century Bedlam's Bard novels reflect this change as well. Against forest backdrops with varying degrees of fantastic augmentation, diaphanous winged humanoid creatures surround realistically rendered male figures in contemporary clothing. The covers mark these novels as fantasy in modern settings, but there is nothing that screams "city" about them.

For all the early novels' concern with juxtaposition, however, the series argues that the contradiction is apparent rather than actual. In *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows*, as I have mentioned, Eric Banyon is treated to two tableaux in Los Angeles. One is actual:

A group of kids were breakdancing on the sidewalk. Eric watched in disbelief as one boy moonwalked backwards, flipped over into a handstand, then rolled to the concrete in a tight backspin. The kid vaulted back up onto his feet, moving aside so one of his friends could take his turn on the pavement.⁵²⁹

[...]

A burst of laughter and applause drew his attention back to the window. Eric saw the breakdancer bow to the gathered crowd, as the elderly man, still carrying his bag of groceries, bent down to put a dollar bill in the cardboard box next to the dancers' tape player.⁵³⁰

Interspersed with this, however, is a vision of the city as it would be without the Sidhe:

The breakdancers were still lounging on the sidewalk, but now they were gathered around an elderly man like hyenas around a helpless gazelle. Eric stared in horror as one of the youths shoved the old man hard against the wall, sending him sprawling facedown on the pavement, where they proceeded to strip his pockets, riffling through the fallen bag of groceries spilling out onto the sidewalk. A gray-haired shopkeeper watched in silence from beyond the dubious safety of his

⁵²⁹ Lackey and Guon, *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* 71-72.

⁵³⁰ Ibid. 74.

storefront, then turned away. Even the pedestrians on the street carefully looked the other way as they walked past.

What in the hell is going on here?

Everything is so gray, so unreal...

Even the Hollywood Hills, instead of their usual green-brown dotted with houses, seemed to have faded. The sky had darkened to a sullen gray. No one on the street laughed, or smiled, or even looked as though they were enjoying life, or were glad to be alive.

They looked more as if they were enduring the last few moments before their own executions.⁵³¹

As in de Lint's work, in defiance of fantasy genre conventions of the time, magic belongs in cities, and cities need magic. Much later in the series, Lackey has Ria Llewellyn recall the two scenes in *Mad Maudlin*⁵³², indicating that whatever the other changes Lackey has wrought in the Bedlam's Bard universe, this remains a constant.

Another function of the city in Lackey's novels is social critique. Lackey uses her novels to point out injustice, and particularly the plight of the poor. For example, when Eric Banyon returns to New York in the twenty-first century, he is struck by the number of homeless people:

He'd gotten used to seeing them in the last few weeks--as used as you could get, anyway--but as he headed east, he realized that the ones in his neighborhood were

⁵³¹ Ibid. 73-74.

⁵³² Lackey and Edghill, *Mad Maudlin* 177.

just the tip of the iceberg. As he left Yuppieland and entered the arena of clinics, flophouses, and [welfare hotels] the tribe of the disenfranchised seemed to multiply, and for the first time Eric realized how very many people in this city had no other home than the streets. Not hundreds. *Thousands.*

And not just people living in the slums or in welfare housing, but people who didn't have any place to go at night at all. [...] These were the 'borderline' people, the ones who'd been dumped out onto the streets from the institutions where many of them had spent their entire lives to make their way as best they could in the world. The idea was that they'd have caseworkers and live in supervised housing, but there weren't enough beds or caseworkers to go around, and so most of these walking wounded ending up alone on the streets. Add to that the junkies who stayed away from social services for fear they'd be jailed, the street kids damaged by predators or the homes they'd run from, and you had thousands and tens of thousands of people living on the streets--the population of an entire shadow city living invisibly in the cracks of the city most people saw.⁵³³

The idea of a shadow city underneath the city is attractive to many urban fantasy authors, and Lackey has been no exception, but here she confronts the gap between what it has looked like in her other novels, and what it looks like in a semblance of real life.

Lackey is particularly concerned with the conditions faced by children, and to illustrate the plight of street kids, she describes the urban environments they call home. This passage is from *Born to Run*:

⁵³³ Lackey and Edghill, *Beyond World's End* 312-313.

Tania Jane Delaney slipped up the warped steps to the apartment she shared with five other kids, her heart in her mouth. The entrance to the upstairs apartments gaped like a toothless mouth when she'd arrived, dark and unfriendly. The light at the top of the stairs had gone out again--or somebody had broken or stolen the bulb--and she shivered with fear with each step she took. Jamie'd been beaten up and robbed twice by junkies; Laura'd had her purse snatched. If anybody knew she had money--if there was someone waiting for her at the top of the stairs--

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This longer description is from 2002's *Mad Maudlin*:

Everybody knew about The Place, she guessed, even the police, but as long as all the ground-floor doors stayed chained shut and the windows stayed closed, and there weren't any lights showing upstairs, it was safe enough. At least, no one was going to hassle the kids living there.

Until something bigger and stronger chased them out.

She went up the stairs, carefully avoiding the holes in the treads and trying not to step on the garbage and trash that littered them. She was just as glad it was almost as cold in here as it was outside; that way the place didn't smell so bad--not like it had when it was warmer. It wasn't like they had indoor plumbing or anything, and none of them was old enough to rent a room anywhere, even if they could come

⁵³⁴ Lackey and Dixon, *Born to Run* 84-85.

up with the money. Apartments in New York cost as much as a whole house in Tulsa, it seemed like.

She reached the fourth floor and looked around. Most of the interior walls had been torn down long ago. All that remained were the support beams of the large interior space. When the building had been condemned, the glass had been removed from the windows facing the street and replaced with large pieces of sheetrock as a defense against vandals. The kids themselves had covered the ones at the sides with sheets of cardboard scavenged from the subway, so that it was always dark now, except for the little light provided by candles and battery-powered lanterns.

The building's new tenants had also covered the wall with posters--stolen from the subways mostly--but nobody wanted to put up things they cared about too much. People were always stealing from each other, and anything you really cared about you kept with you all the time.⁵³⁵

One might rightly note that these descriptions of a city fraught with danger are at odds with the idea that the city is something worth reclaiming; however, most readers would probably agree that no child, indeed no human being, belongs on the streets of even the most vibrant and livable city.

In the *Elemental Masters* series, Lackey is more critical of the city: Victorian London is described as fetid, crowded, and dangerous, with little to redeem it.⁵³⁶ One of the

⁵³⁵ Lackey and Edghill, *Mad Maudlin* 29-30.

⁵³⁶ A trip to the north of England revealed to me that anti-urban prejudices were not unfounded: the town centres of communities that burgeoned during the Industrial Revolution suffered from a lack of planning, and

manifestations of Alderscroft's bespellment is that he thinks himself ill-suited for "country life,"⁵³⁷ and is certain that his evil mentor, the Lady Cordelia, would not enjoy it either.

Why does this series take a different view of the city? For one, the dichotomy that William Cronon outlines in "The Trouble With Wilderness" was alive and well in nineteenth-century London, and it is easy to imagine that with the city being *a priori* overcrowded, dirty, dangerous, and disagreeable, there would be little to no effort to make it less so. British cities--ancient and overwhelmingly unplanned--are much denser than North American ones, with far less green space. Add to that industrial effluvia, lack of infrastructure, and laws and customs that made large swathes of the city perilous for the poor and inaccessible to other classes, and it is easy to see why its inhabitants would wish to escape.

Moreover, this is a world in which the ideas Lackey champions--gender equality, multiculturalism, and environmentalism, to name a few--are considered dangerous and radical. Sympathetic characters share these values, but their opposites must find expression somehow. As I will show in a later section, villains accomplish this rather handily, of course. However, in this case Victorian London itself serves as a cautionary tale of the results of sexism, racism, disregard for the poor, and unbridled industry. Early on in *The Wizard of London*, Lackey points out that the divide between urban and rural is an expression of class divisions: Sarah Jane Lyon-White observes, of the Harton School, "The bad neighborhood was one of the reasons why it was not a 'first class' school. 'First-class'

of consideration of what human beings needed to carry out fulfilled--nay, bearable--lives. Accrington, in particular, was a sea of grey pavement. See the Appendix.

⁵³⁷ Lackey, *The Wizard of London* 189.

schools were situated outside of cities, far from bad neighborhoods, bad air, and the dangers and temptations of a metropolis.”⁵³⁸

Finally, the city, for Lackey, is a place of danger, of the sort that makes for lively and emotionally satisfying narratives. Lackey’s work, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, shows an attraction to the idea of eternal vigilance. The city, in her novels, is a place that demands that vigilance, and the vigilance itself makes the work more exciting, and sets up dramatic irony. The mistaking of friends for criminals creates one kind of tension⁵³⁹; the mistaking of magical predators for mere criminals creates another.

For Lackey, cities are full of dragons for the hero to fight. Like magic, they add both a threat and a savour to the world: there one can be truly alive, and cultivate the qualities that make one a better human being, such as strength, fearlessness, and yes, eternal vigilance. On the one hand, a fantasy that connects its mythical evil to actual figures or types that the reader is likely to encounter is refreshing and fun, and lends these villains a relevance that they may not have in high fantasy. On the other hand, this of course presupposes a city filled with predators, which itself is an assumption founded in problematic ideas about class, race, and gender. As I said earlier, there is a risk in mythologizing those who victimize others. If the goal is to empower readers to feel that such people can be resisted, and that resistance to them constitutes a type of heroism, then the enterprise can arguably be a fruitful one. If, however, the goal is to understand why people hurt each other in an effort to make things better, then encouraging one to see predators everywhere is counterproductive.

⁵³⁸ Ibid. 14.

⁵³⁹ Lackey and Guon, *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* 341.

In addition to cities themselves, Lackey's novels, more than those of any other author in the current study, explore both the ennui and the fantastic possibilities of the suburban landscape. In *Born to Run*, a great deal of the action occurs in suburban locations: a racetrack, an airplane hangar, Tannim's rented house just outside of the city. This neither a pastoral landscape nor wasteland: in a book featuring protagonists who race cars, it is reasonable to expect the celebration of large stretches of open road. In *Jinx High*, on the other hand, the suburbs are a sterile trap. Jenks is a "yuppie paradise. Every acquisitive dream come true, and no slums to mar the landscaping; no low-income housing, no porno rows, no bag ladies, no 'undesirables.'"⁵⁴⁰ Tregarde remarks, "This town looks like Yuppie Central. Capital of expensive bland--no guts, no passion--Jeez, Lar, even the [...] houses are pastel. And the *people*--cut 'em and they'll bleed tofu."⁵⁴¹

Even novels with more urban settings seem to have roots in suburbia. Virtually all of Lackey's endangered child protagonists hail from suburban backgrounds: street kids Tania Delaney, Magnus Banyon, Ace Fairchild, and even Unseleighe Sidhe child Jachiel Ap Gabrevys fled affluent neighbourhoods outside of the city for the streets in response to too-demanding parents.

What, then, is the use of suburbia in Lackey's urban fantasies? First of all, she pokes holes in the ideal of the American suburban lifestyle. Secondly, she makes the narrative argument that child abuse can take the form of behaviours that tend to be a mark of affluence and are not traditionally regarded as abusive: pressuring children to become prodigies, for example, or structuring their time too rigidly, or treating them as status symbols. Lackey says of Jenks:

⁵⁴⁰ Lackey, *Jinx High* 16.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid. 65.

It harbored those who lived a sheltered, pampered life. The kids who went to Jenks were used to living their parents' fine lifestyle to the hilt, used to the goodies that came without asking.

[...] More money than they knew what to do with, and parents too busy clawing their way to the top to pay *too* much attention to what their kids did with that money. They'd had expert nannies as babies--the finest shrinks money could buy to get them through their early teens--and once they reached sixteen or seventeen, most Jenks parents figured their kids could take care of themselves. Sort of the ultimate latchkey children. So long as they didn't bring the law down on them, so long as they kept their grades up and *looked* like they were straight, everything was cool.⁵⁴²

Lackey's novels do not go so far as to reclaim the suburbs in the way that de Lint has reclaimed the city--the suburbs are never celebrated and re-enchanted the way that New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, or even downtown Savannah are--but the novels do seem to be pitched at suburban teenaged readers. If the novels cannot redeem the suburbs for their inhabitants, at least they can acknowledge that readers' grievances are legitimate, and that escape is possible--eventually.

⁵⁴² Ibid. 16-17.

Protagonists

Lackey's novels are narrated through a succession of limited third-person narrators. Some of these--typically recurring protagonists in the series, such as Diana Tregarde, Eric Banyon, and Tannim Drake--will speak from what is recognizably the author's point of view. Others--sympathetic characters specific to that book--are handled from a slightly greater distance, but these are too numerous to deal with here. As a group, they tend to be sensible and benevolent, but to have limited resources or specific blind spots that make them less powerful than the recurring characters.

i) Diana Tregarde and Tannim Drake

The Diana Tregarde novels are some of the earliest examples of the supernatural-romance-as-urban-fantasy subgenre, and, with the first one published in 1990, Lackey's first foray into the realm of urban fantasy. Diana Tregarde is a romance novelist who moonlights as a Guardian, a vanquisher of supernatural evil. The first book, *Children of the Night*, takes place in New York City; the second, *Burning Water*, in Dallas; and the third, *Jinx High*, in the suburbs of Tulsa. She appears in *Jinx High* thus:

She was willowy and supple, and looked athletic without looking like an athlete. In fact, Deke had the startling impression that she was in better physical shape than Fay. About five feet tall, she had an overall build like a dancer, and she moved like a dancer, too. Instead of the holdover hippie outfit of peasant skirt and

baggy blouse, or patched jeans and ratty T-shirt he'd been picturing her in, she was wearing a leotard that might as well have been a second skin and chic designer jeans nearly as tight as the leotard. She *was* wearing makeup; subtle, just enough to make her look model-like and a touch exotic. Her waist-length chestnut hair was caught in a ponytail, and hadn't even a trace of gray.⁵⁴³

In other words, she fulfills Western ideals of beauty without appearing to try. She is also prepared for a fight. The character initially has a weakness--recurring panic attacks resulting from a near miss with a Nightflyer--at the beginning of the series, but overcomes the attacks in the first book, after which they cease to be a consideration. Diana has a ruthless streak, and tends to blame people for their misfortune.⁵⁴⁴ This could be a function of the universe as Lackey conceives of it at this point, too; as I mentioned, karma appears to play a powerful role, especially in these early novels.

The SERRA novels take place in the American southwest, where Seleighe Court elves have taken to racing cars and rescuing abused children--often from magical predators. Diana and Tannim Drake, the protagonist of *Born to Run*, are cut from the same cloth: compassionate, witty, no-nonsense, masters of their respective mundane and magical arts, ideal specimens of European beauty, and paranoid in a way that Lackey frames as healthy and reasonable. Where Diana is a romance novelist, Tannim is a racecar driver--jobs that young readers might be expected to yearn for, that give these characters access to virtually unlimited resources while allowing them the flexibility to go on magical adventures and the

⁵⁴³ Ibid. 56.

⁵⁴⁴ In the opening pages of *Children of the Night*, Tregarde thinks that the heroine of her novel, who goes out walking at night on a deserted beach, is just asking to be "ravished"; and when the news reports that eight people have died of taking a designer drug, she opines that they deserved it.

freedom to critique the status quo without fear of reprisal. They are both likeable characters, and always voices of reason, but they do not change much from book to book, nor do they ever seem to hold an opinion or follow a line of reasoning with which Lackey herself would find fault.⁵⁴⁵

ii) Eric Banyon

More interesting is the character of Eric Banyon. A Julliard dropout, he is introduced in the first few lines of *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* while being dumped by his girlfriend. Penniless and often drunk, he is dragged into respectability, despite his best efforts, by his bardic gifts.

The Bedlam's Bard novels begin at the same time as the SERRA novels, and are unremarkable except as an example of a protagonist from whom Lackey maintains a bit of distance. In the 21st century, however, Eric is "resurrected" in post-9/11 New York. After a stint in Faerie, he has returned to Earth newly sober, intent on finishing his interrupted training at Julliard, and equipped with unlimited financial resources. This is a new kind of urban fantasy protagonist, no longer footloose but still committed to justice.

Eric is no longer interested in living parallel to mainstream culture, in a world of art and music; the novels involve his struggle to fit into life in New York--albeit with the experience of a forty-year-old in the body of a twenty-something, and virtually unlimited financial resources. He has responsibilities in addition to periodically saving the world--

⁵⁴⁵ Also strikingly similar are Sidhe protagonists Alinor and Maclyn from *Wheels of Fire* and *When the Bough Breaks* respectively. Even though these are Sidhe characters, and therefore not human, they share the above list of characteristics exactly, to the point that they are difficult to tell apart.

first his classes at Julliard, and then the raising of his runaway teenaged brother. He stays sober and regularly sees a therapist.

The change in Eric likely has its roots as much outside of the fictional world as inside. Lackey's website suggest a growing exasperation with fans, and in her piece "The Last Straw," she writes:

[...] When your life is in the [toilet], you can't get a job that doesn't involve a paper hat and a nametag, and you think if you dropped off the planet no one would miss you for weeks, it's comforting to believe that all your misfortunes can be blamed on an Evil Occult Force.

I had myself talked into that one for a while, but at one critical point I had what the Twelve Step groups call 'a moment of clarity,' when someone else who had bought into the delusion began coming up with things I knew just weren't true and I realized that the world is what it is, and it doesn't take an evil force to make it that way---[sic]and that I was doing a better job of keeping myself unemployed than any Evil Occult Force could. That's when I forced myself to admit that I had the best chance of making my life better if I just got a good suit from Goodwill instead of wearing costumes, pounded the pavement looking for work instead of waiting for a Dream Job to be given to me, and put more and smarter effort into realistic goals,

like learning computer programming instead of spending all my time staring at a candle and trying to contact my Personal Psychic Trainer.⁵⁴⁶

In the same piece, she announces that she and her husband will no longer attend SF conventions, precisely because of fans who have trouble distinguishing between the fantasy in her novels and reality. In this light, the adulthood of Eric Banyon reads as an attempt to drag readers back down to Earth.

iii) Isabelle Harton and Nan Killian

The Wizard of London has three protagonists. Isabelle Harton is the headmistress of the Harton School, a school for expatriates' children who have been sent back to England for their health. Harton also trains psychically gifted children. Harton is a protagonist like Tannim or Diana Tregarde, with her attitudes and behaviour adjusted slightly for Victorian England.

One of the children in her care is Nan, a former street urchin. While part of Isabelle Harton's strength derives from her education and her knowledge of the system, many of Nan's advantages stem from her past on the streets. She is brave, practical, virtually impossible to shock, and very cautious--an example of a person who has been strengthened by the lessons the city can teach. Her ability to assume the worst of people saves Isabelle and Sarah on several occasions. She also occasionally serves as Lackey's mouthpiece: when

⁵⁴⁶ Mercedes Lackey, "The Last Straw," 2010, 6 November 2012
<www.mercedeslackey.com/features_laststraw.html>.

something defies the Victorian understanding of the world, it will appear in Nan's thoughts as plain good sense.

iv) David Alderscroft

The third narrator is Lord David Alderscroft, who is an ambivalent figure. His passages are neither the comfortable internal monologue of a protagonist, nor the utterly alien musings of a Lackey villain, but an odd mixture of both. Lackey's assessment of Alderscroft's culpability is intriguing: he is actually the victim of an enchantment, but it is an enchantment that reinforces the prejudices of his own time. In many ways, he is an attempt to represent a rarity in Lackey's novels, a sexist character who changes his mind. As such, I would like to concentrate on him.

Although other characters talk about him, and the villainous Lady Cordelia interacts with him, Alderscroft does not take his turn as narrator until nearly halfway through the book. He begins thus:

David Alderscroft looked out over the tree-shaded boulevard in front of his town house and frowned. Too many people, too many untidy people, clattering back and forth along the pavement. A nurse pushing a pram., some wretched boy running an errand, two carriages, and a tradesman's van--too many people. How much better would it have been had there been no one out there, the pavement spotless, the street silent--

Better still had it been winter. Everything lightly coated in snow, all the imperfections invisible beneath the frozen blanket. That would be ideal--

It would be so tidy if winter remained year round. No mess, people properly remaining inside their own four walls, tradesmen keeping to their proper place in the alleys. He entertained himself with a vision of the frozen city for a moment, everything as pure and white and clean as new marble, with nothing to mar the shining perfection of it.⁵⁴⁷

Note that his thralldom to the Lady Cordelia and through her, the Ice Lord, plays out as misanthropy, classism, and a wish for purity. However, he is not, as the Lady Cordelia is, entirely unsympathetic. Sarah says of him, after she and Nan encounter him, “[H]e’s unhappy, and he knows why, but if he actually admits that he’s unhappy and why, he’ll have to admit that he’s wrong and he’s been wrong about everything.”⁵⁴⁸ Nan thinks less of him, musing:

It wasn’t just that he was an arrogant toff, it was that there was something very cold, something not quite right about him. As if someone had taken away his heart and put a clod of frozen earth where it should have been. He’d nearly trampled both of them, and not one word of apology! No, he was too busy showing two poor little girls how important a fellow he was.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁷ Lackey, *The Wizard of London* 145.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid. 294.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid. 293.

Later, she admits, “he wasn’t *bad* evil, he was only the sort that would meddle because he thought he had a right and he thought he was stronger than anything he meddled in.”⁵⁵⁰

But Alderscroft is revealed to have qualms about his own position, the people around him, and the implications of their actions:

All were devoted, more or less, to the arts of manipulation. They were facades [sic], like stage scenery, implying a substance and solidity that was in reality nothing more than paint on canvas. They did not read; they did not think much past the needs of themselves and their select circle. When they attended plays or concerts, it was not to pay attention to the performance, but to be seen attending the performance. Their wives were pleasant nonentities, chosen for their ability to adorn a dinner table and play gracious hostess--and for the ability to smile and meekly accept whatever their lord and master decreed. [...] All men had their failings, and he was no more a bastion of personal rectitude than the next fellow, that he should go casting stones. The problem was that these men set themselves up as the models of rectitude while secretly and deliberately choosing the opposite path. [...] It was a chess game on a grand scale, hunting for weaknesses, not exploiting them yet, but having the knowledge ready if it needed to be used. He liked chess. He wished he could take the same pleasure in this game. [...] The trouble was, it was always the pawns that were sacrificed, and the pawns were

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. 313.

anything but bloodless. Wives, children, associates--people who would probably suffer more than the major players if everything went badly.⁵⁵¹

These musings seem to be at odds with his earlier misogyny and his brusqueness with Nan and Sarah. On one level, they establish him as someone with good intentions and at least a measure of regard for the people over whom he--very nearly literally, in Nan and Sarah's case--rides roughshod. On the other, they identify him as just another one of the hypocrites he affects to despise, handwringing over the fate of abstract children while he treats real children callously.

But Alderscroft's chance encounter with Nan leaves him seeing himself through her eyes, as "[s]omeone who did nothing and consumed everything; who deserved nothing and helped himself to everything. Who had never actually *earned* anything he had gotten in life--"⁵⁵² When he reminds himself of how hard he has worked, his inner Nan amends, "*You've earned them, right enough. Enjoying them?*"⁵⁵³ He is not, but elsewhere he admonishes himself, "It was more than time to put away childish notions, to settle into the serious business of life. Life was not church fetes and ices. Life was doing things one did not want to do with the goal of getting things, great things, accomplished."⁵⁵⁴

Alderscroft is aware that he is unhappy, but he is unaware that the Lady Cordelia plans to steal his body so that she can carry out her plans for the domination of England personally instead of doing so vicariously through him. Her machinations, the cause of his rejection of Isabelle and his political jockeying, are actually also the instrument of his

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. 226-227.

⁵⁵² Ibid. 293.

⁵⁵³ Ibid. 293.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. 228.

salvation: the magical threat she poses is enough to warrant his rescue by Isabelle and the other Warriors of the Light.⁵⁵⁵ At the end of the book, Isabelle Harton and Sarah-Jane Lyon-White verbally persuade David Alderscroft that friendship is more important than political power, and that he is really a joyless husk of a man. With Alderscroft refusing to go along with Lady Cordelia's plans, the Ice Lord--the elemental⁵⁵⁶ evil to whom she answers--realizes that she will fail, and consumes her. *Morally* speaking, this relatively peaceful solution is preferable to a knockdown magical battle, and it is in keeping with the end of "The Snow Queen," but from a craft point of view, it is unsatisfying for a reader who has spent the entire novel anticipating this final confrontation, and who has seen other such episodes end differently. Lackey's fiction is structured along what Gregory Desilet would call melodramatic lines, so that a story that does *not* end in the destruction of the antagonist is a violation of reader expectations.

Alderscroft's character arc raises other questions. Unlike Little Kay, who rejects Gerda and lives in the Snow Queen's castle in the original tale, Alderscroft's frozenness takes a form that echoes pre-existing prejudices in his culture, and allows him to rise quite high. Is this a further critique of Victorian culture, that it manages to mirror the agenda of evil so closely, apparently without the aid of magic? Or is it merely that Lady Cordelia has manipulated him in ways that will both give him power and cut him off from those who could challenge her?

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid. 369.

⁵⁵⁶ No pun intended.

Lackey and Policing

Eric Banyon, Hosea Songmaker, Diana, and all but Alderscroft in *The Wizard of London* are (as are the Heralds in Lackey's Valdemar fantasies) human members of various varieties of arcane police force: Hosea and Diana are Guardians in New York City, and Eric works closely with them. The Hartons, Nan, and Sarah Jane Lyon-White, along with their servants Agansing and Karamjit, are Warriors of the Light. All are magically selected for their roles because they are both powerful and incorruptible. All are inexplicably furnished with swords.

Although readers have apparently found the idea of the Guardians compelling and attractive enough to project it into real life, the Warriors of the Light, who to magical sight transform into knights in culturally appropriate shining armour, are cartoonish. However, the problems are more than aesthetic: these power structures, in both universes, are magically ordained and their actors magically selected. They are capable of making mistakes, but never of acting unjustly. This removes the possibility of critiquing them in good faith.

Lackey has dedicated a number of novels to police and firefighters, and in her Valdemar fantasies these dedications explicitly draw links between these professions and the Heralds and Tayledras, the magical policing bodies in *those* novels. One can see in her work a growing fascination with, and respect for, policing powers. She is aware of the possibility of misusing such powers in real life: Beth Kentraine has been forced Underhill because of just such an instance, and Parker Wheatley's Paranormal Defence Initiative provides another example. But magical enforcers who are incapable of wrongdoing

propose an ominous relationship between police powers and the individual, and further, propose that that relationship is a natural one, rather than a cultural construct.

Sources of Evil

Lackey's early urban fantasies fall back on some of the genre's staple sources of evil: Perry Llewellyn, corporate powerhouse, turns out to be Perenor, traitor against the Sidhe. Magic-eating Nightflyers nearly break through into San Francisco through the efforts of a rogue branch of government researching the paranormal. There is, of course, the Unseleighe Court, to be discussed shortly. And in the Diana Tregarde novels, imported from scores of teen-oriented stories from a variety of genres, there is the most popular girl in high school:

Di took an instant dislike to Fay Harper. She was blond and gorgeous, and at the moment looked like the proverbial cat that ate the canary. Exactly the kind of chick that used to make *Di's* life miserable back when she was in school. It was pretty obvious to Di what was going on here; Fay was playing Deke against Sandy, and neither one of the boys was bright enough to catch on to what she was doing.

There was more to it than that, though. Di had gotten a peculiar feeling the moment she laid eyes on Fay Harper--a feeling as though there was something very wrong about her. It was an uneasiness that ran deeper than the animosity Di would have felt *anyway*, given that the girl was obviously a manipulative little tart.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁷ Lackey, *Jinx High* 252.

Fay Harper is actually a centuries-old sorceress who preserves her youth by switching bodies with her daughters as soon as they hit puberty. In many ways, Harper is an excellent example of evil as it appears in Lackey's early work. Although she is outwardly beautiful, her wrongness is palpable, at least to a character with Tregarde's refined powers of perception. Like the earliest incarnation of Ria Llewellyn, she uses sex to control men, taking advantage of traditional gender roles. She is, in other words, tempting to straight men, but viciously competitive with straight women, with Lackey using these aspects of Tolkienesque evil to critique gender roles.

The newer Bedlam's Bard novels have ballooned in complexity, featuring a whole host of "dragons" for the hero to defeat. In *Mad Maudlin*, the action is motivated the confluence of a runaway Unseleighe child, his frantic protector who has been negatively affected by Manhattan's atmosphere, Eric Banyon visiting his abusive parents for the first time in twenty years and discovering that he has a brother who has just run away from home, the Unseleighe Lord behind Reverend Billy Fairchild mounting a magical search for Fairchild's runaway daughter, Eric's old enemy Parker Wheatley of the Paranormal Defense Initiative resurfacing, and a conman starting a cult by claiming to be one of the Guardians. This plot depends on a large cast and an astonishing set of coincidences, and evil runs the gamut from the systemic to the ecological to the merely venial. Arguably, creating a situation in which many people--some of whom are less benevolent than others--pursue their own plausible goals is more reasonable than making the situation the work of a single party.

Even in these more complex novels, the author argues, through Eric Banyon, for the preservation of evil as a category of behaviour:

It sounded awfully melodramatic when he put it that way--as if he might have a cape and tights hanging in his closet [...]--but how else was he supposed to describe things like Threshold and Aerune, or Perenor, or the powers behind the Poseidon Project? Cranky? Bad-mannered? Socially unacceptable? No. They were Evil. Each of them, in their own ways, had been out to hurt or kill a large number of people for nothing more than their own personal gain, and if there was a better definition of Evil, Eric hadn't found it yet.⁵⁵⁸

There are several problems with this definition. First of all, it is in part a functional definition, based on what evil *does*, but the examples all involve magic. Does evil require the presence of magic, in which case evil is more soundly in the realm of the mythical? Or is evil mundane, and Evil mythical? Secondly, Lackey's definition seems to exempt those who hurt or kill a large number of people for reasons *other* than personal gain: were the Holocaust or Stalin's purges or the Spanish Inquisition, because they involved mass murder for *ideological* reasons⁵⁵⁹, merely "cranky" or "bad-mannered" or "socially unacceptable"? Thirdly, as I hope is evident above, the alternatives to evil that Lackey presents enter the realm of *reductio ad absurdum*. And finally, the motivations that Lackey assigns to her examples--the desire to hurt or kill for personal gain--are simply incorrect. Aerune and

⁵⁵⁸ Lackey and Edghill, *Mad Maudlin* 54.

⁵⁵⁹ These instances all involved arguments that the actions of the perpetrators were in the service of the greater good, in order to stamp out something that at the time was perceived as evil. Whether one believes that the arguments were in fact made in good faith, they seem to have convinced many people at the time.

Perenor are both motivated by personal vendettas, which, although ill-advised, would be framed in their own minds as justice, and as Ria later finds out, Perenor in fact sacrifices potential profits to pursue his revenge. The Poseidon Project featured in *Summoned to Tourney* is an initiative to use technology to reduce stress along fault lines, in order to prevent catastrophic earthquakes, thereby *saving* lives.⁵⁶⁰ It shares a building with the Cassandra Project, which appears to be less defensible, and is run by an apparent (sexist) sociopath,⁵⁶¹ but both of these are government operations that must, at least to themselves and their immediate supervisors, justify their existence in terms of the well-being of the American people. That leaves the example of Threshold, a corporate entity whose motive is profit--just like any other corporate entity. What Lackey frames as evil, explicitly or implicitly, is frequently more complicated than the definition that she gives here.

Elemental evil and essential evil--inscrutable, inhuman evils that have no apparent motive other than presiding over suffering and destruction--are present in many of Lackey's high fantasies, but also in a handful of her urban fantasies. There it acts at one remove, working in the world of the city through servants. The Ice Lord who commands Lady Cordelia Bryce-Coll is one:

...[S]he was still not entirely sure what the creature in the ice cave called itself.

Possibly an Ice Dragon; it was more powerful than any Phoenix or Firebird she had ever encountered, and the only Elemental of the flame aspect of Fire that was more

⁵⁶⁰ Lackey and Guon, *Summoned to Tourney, Bedlam's Bard*, 452-453. Perhaps, however, Lackey is referring to the Nightflyers themselves. The Nightflyers are from another, less hospitable plane, and Lackey paints them as essentially evil. They also work, metaphorically, as undocumented immigrants, and also as an uncanny America, invading a land of abundance in an uncanny recapitulation of Manifest Destiny.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. 448.

powerful was an avatar of a fire god, or a dragon. In return for subjugating her Power of Air to the Power of Ice, she would be granted a force far more effective than that of Air alone. It didn't matter to Cordelia; she had gotten what she wanted, and near as she could tell, the only thing the entity wanted in return was for more control to be exerted in the world by Ice. Sometimes it was difficult to fathom the motives of Elementals; by definition they didn't think like humans.⁵⁶²

Very close to the end of the book, the Ice Lord reveals that what it wants is England, frozen, for itself. England's status at the time as a political, economic, and imperial power seems largely irrelevant to its capacity to freeze, so why the Ice Lord would want such a tiny bit of territory is unclear; elemental evil's goals are not logical, but are instead tailored to the fears of the projected audience.

An instance of essential evil is referenced in passing by Diana Tregarde:

[Melinda Dayton,] who looked so pathetic, had been dismembering kittens at seven, torturing and intimidating her playmates at eight, and at nine had learned how to bring in outside allies to help her do the same to adults. [...] Melinda Dayton, demon-child, who even before puberty had learned the pleasures of cruelty and pain.

*Willingly, with full knowledge of what she was doing. Enjoying it. Granny had claimed that there were kids like that, born absolutely evil, wrong, twisted. Who knew the dark and chose it. Di had been skeptical. After Melinda, she believed.*⁵⁶³

⁵⁶² Lackey, *The Wizard of London* 160.

⁵⁶³ Lackey, *Jinx High* 69-70.

Melinda Dayton's story is never told, and this is the only representation of her. Even Lackey, who argues for the existence of evil, has difficulty representing essential evil in human form.

A second category of evil has to do with what is most aptly called thwarted privilege. The Unseleighe Sidhe, who resent humans for driving the Sidhe Underhill, fit into this category. So does Perenor, who before being exiled from the Seleighe Court asked Prince Terenil, "Why [...] should we be subject to the vagaries of humanity? Why should we allow *their* lives to rule what *we* did? We had magic at our disposal; our lives were infinitely longer--why should *we* not rule *them*?"⁵⁶⁴ Robert Lintel, the human director of Threshold Labs, fits into this category as well. He is developing drugs to create psychic powers because he "wanted to control the powerful people. He saw himself in charge of a group of perfect psychic spies, assassins, and saboteurs, whose work was undetectable...and whose skills were for sale to the highest bidder, though he never said that."⁵⁶⁵ He treats both his employees⁵⁶⁶ and the animal test subjects⁵⁶⁷ with contempt. When they move to human trials on street people, it is Lintel who proposes selling the new drug as a street drug:

'They'll buy it, and you'll have your test pool--cheap, easy, and nothing for us to clean up after. We'll rope in the ones that survive, run them through the mill, and find the common thread. Once we have that profile, we can use it to find volunteer subjects.' [...]

⁵⁶⁴ Lackey and Guon, *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* 217.

⁵⁶⁵ Lackey and Edghill, *Beyond World's End* 100.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid. 102-103.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid. 109.

‘There’s going to be dead junkies stacked like cordwood on every street corner,’ Jeanette said slowly trying to decide how that made her feel. She knew she ought to like the idea, but instead she felt curiously numb inside. How confident must Robert be, how eager for his results, to suggest a plan that held so much possibility of... unforeseen consequences.

But Robert didn’t even seem to notice her lack of enthusiasm. He bored in, eyes glittering like a high-pressure salesman closing a big deal.

‘And your point is? C’mon, Campbell, we’re looking for results here, not scientific validation. If we generate the Survivor Profile, nobody’s going to care how we got it.’⁵⁶⁸

When Jeanette tries to question one of the test subjects, Lintel sneers, “Oh for God’s sake, Campbell. You don’t need to talk to her.”⁵⁶⁹ After threatening Unseleighe elf Aerune mac Audelaine, the Lord of Death and Pain, with a gun, Lintel barely escapes their encounter with his life.⁵⁷⁰ Afterward, he tells Jeanette, “Campbell, there’s no such thing as elves, so this guy can’t be one, Q.E.D. [...] If he’s allergic to iron, that’s good. It’ll give us some way of handling him. The important thing is to get him back.”⁵⁷¹ Lintel has no compassion for those less powerful than him, and he responds to those who are more powerful by working out ways to bring them under his control.

In *Mad Maudlin*, Parker Wheatley, the government man, and Freddie Warwick, who leads a cult as Fafnir, Master of Treasure, are both characters of this type, although their

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid. 159-160.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. 208.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. 282.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid. 285.

approaches to power and how they use it are geared towards their different positions. Wheatley is another human who, faced with Aerune mac Audelaine, tried to gain power over him. The head of Washington's PDI, or Paranormal Defense Initiative, he is obsessed with repelling an imaginary alien threat⁵⁷² in whose name he persecuted the Seleighe Sidhe in earlier novels. When faced with a truly dangerous Sidhe, however, he offered a partnership, which Aerune found useful-- a thinly veiled critique of US foreign policy. In *Mad Maudlin*, Aerune has been defeated by the Guardians, so Wheatley kidnaps, imprisons, and tortures⁵⁷³ an innocent occult book dealer in order to force him to conjure an elf. Beforehand, he reflects, "[P]erhaps their new elf would be more cooperative and forthcoming than Aerune had been. He wasn't averse to another interspecies partnership[...]. Only this time he'd be sure to make sure that everyone involved was straight on where the *real* power in the arrangement lay."⁵⁷⁴

Fafnir, on the other hand, has a dead-end job and little more than a sense of entitlement and good acting abilities. His goal is to become a Guardian, one of the mages who protects New York, but, he thinks, "he wouldn't waste his Guardian power going around saving losers [...] from demons. No. He'd do really cool things with it. And he would certainly not squander his time and effort on anyone but himself."⁵⁷⁵ He creates a cult, exploits them for personal gain, and hatches a plan to kill one of the Guardians so that Fafnir can replace him.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷² In *Spirits White as Lightning*, his operatives become virtually hysterical about a Seleighe Sidhe-operated casino, and terrorize Beth and Korendil on one of their rare excursions to the mortal world.

⁵⁷³ Lackey and Edghill, *Mad Maudlin* 195.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. 123.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. 112.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. 370.

Leaving aside the Unseleighe Sidhe examples for the moment, these three male characters are entirely self-absorbed, obsessed with gaining power. They are apparently incapable of empathy, and the best one can hope to become in their eyes is a potential pawn. They do not have, or need, origin stories. Perhaps they are mature Melinda Daytons, born evil; but Lackey may also mean to make them examples of the perniciousness of privilege, in that these men have been richly rewarded for their callousness. They are always sexist, a flaw that I will focus on shortly.

Most of the female villains in Lackey's novels, on the other hand, turn to evil because of systemic injustice that prevents their getting what they want through the channels that others have access to. Fay Harper's original incarnation fled to the New World because of persecution for being a wealthy widow not interested in marrying again, and because she worried that others would find out about her practice of the sorcerous "Arte."⁵⁷⁷ Although she derives joy from seeing herself as immoral, and she does eventually steal the body of her daughter in a botched attempt to sacrifice her, her worst crimes up to that point *appear* to be practicing sorcery and having a daughter who enjoys sex more than is socially appropriate for the time period.⁵⁷⁸ Fay Harper may be just plain bad. It is also possible, that, born into a world where power and sex were forbidden things, she may have grown so used to some kinds of transgression that others came easily; or she may have sought to excel in the one role open to her.

In *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows*, Ria Llewellyn was created to fulfill her father Perenor's plans to destroy the Sidhe of Sun-Descending, but her own stake in the plan is

⁵⁷⁷ Lackey, *Jinx High* 152-153. Her original incarnation's name is Cordelia, although she does not appear to be connected to the Lady Cordelia in *The Wizard of London*.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. 153.

that it gives her access to Eric Banyon, whom she loves, and if she keeps him captive at her home she can prevent her father killing him. And in *Beyond World's End*, Jeanette Campbell, who does not conform to Western standards of beauty--being "sloppily plump, with thin fine mouse-brown hair dragged back in an unforgiving pony-tail, persistent acne, and short stubby fingers"⁵⁷⁹--becomes an outlaw chemist as a way of gaining power and respect, and thereby becomes involved in Threshold Labs, where she tries to develop a drug that will give her the psychic powers she has always read about and dreamed of.⁵⁸⁰ Even while she is still at Threshold, Jeanette has moments of compassion, going out of her way to treat and eventually magically heal a woman with terminal ovarian cancer.⁵⁸¹ As I mentioned earlier, both Ria and Jeanette are rewarded with chances to redeem themselves.

Lady Cordelia, from *The Wizard of London*, is the example in which the trend is made most explicit. Having pledged her allegiance to the elementally evil Ice Lord, she finds herself barred from the halls of power:

There really was only one group standing in the way of Cordelia's ambitions.

Men.

The world was owned and ruled by men. Women were distinctly second-class citizens: cherished pets at best, or chattel at worst. Men maneuvering for positions of power who listened to the advice of women were thought weak. Only the artistic could grant status to women, and the artistic had no power except in their own circles. No matter what she did, no matter how many little whisperers

⁵⁷⁹ Lackey and Edghill, *Beyond World's End* 95.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. 97.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. 217-220.

[child ghosts who whisper her will to sleepers] she created, she would never have the position of power she required. Men were particularly resistant to those whispers of self-doubt that were so effective against women.⁵⁸²

Cordelia cultivates Alderscroft as a proxy until she hits upon the idea of taking his body for her own.

On the one hand, in this case it is a good idea that the Lady Cordelia is not able to get her way on her own: Great Britain is saved from eternal winter by the forces of sexism. On the other, it is Cordelia's inability to wield power directly that leads her to her worst crimes. But if a fundamentally unjust system works against her in one instance, it works for her in others: she takes advantage of the large numbers of children living on the streets in abject poverty, offering them charity and then killing them to create an army of little ghosts.⁵⁸³ These are her "little whisperers" who creep into the halls of power and manipulate the powerful according to her wishes.

The little whisperers illuminate an interesting feature of Lackey's work, whereby consciousness of wrongdoing is the only thing that keeps her villains from being better and more conscientious than the world at large. When Cordelia wants to test her body-switching spell, she gets two boys from an orphanage, where they are "two of the scant ten percent that survived infancy and emerged into childhood"⁵⁸⁴:

⁵⁸² Lackey, *The Wizard of London* 163.

⁵⁸³ Ibid. 161.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. 279.

Food was scant, and poor. Generally as little as the directors of the places could get by with. Cordelia suspected that they were pocketing the difference between what they were allotted to feed each child and what they actually used to feed each child. Meat was practically unheard of, the staple diet was oatmeal porridge, thin vegetable soup, and bread. Infants were weaned onto this as soon as possible. The infants in orphanages were generally wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes and laid out on cots, as many as would fit on each cot, so that they looked like tinned sardines. In this orphanage, they were lucky, their smallclothes were changed twice a day; in many other places, once a day was the rule. They were fed skimmed milk, or the buttermilk left after the butter had been churned out of it; this was cheaper, much cheaper, than whole milk. They didn't cry much; crying took energy, and these infants did not have a great deal of that to spare.⁵⁸⁵

Cordelia takes advantage of the expendability of poor children in Victorian culture, but in taking the two boys as experimental subjects, she feeds and clothes them, and buys them secondhand toys and picture books. At the end of the experiment, she painlessly kills one⁵⁸⁶, and sets the other up with a job as a chimney-sweep's apprentice. Even if she is a heartless ice witch with contemptible motives, her children have more comfortable lives than they did previously, and her efforts have a fifty percent survival rate--five times better than that of the heads of the orphanages, who would have been lauded as great and compassionate in their day. Whether Lackey means for the reader to be anything but horrified at Cordelia's behaviour and the society that facilitates it is unclear, but like Fay

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. 280.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. 302-303.

Harper's original incarnation, Cordelia seems satisfied, even pleased, with conceiving of her own actions as devious and callous, rather than attempting to soothe her conscience with any of the arguments Victorians actually used.

This is a flaw in Lackey's work: with the exception of David Alderscroft and Jeanette Campbell, while peripheral characters can be mistaken or wrongheaded, villains are always aware that what they are doing is bad, and they suffer no qualms about it, willfully choosing to feel only contempt for the people they harm. This is Luke Russell's "psychologically thick" conception of evil, whereby evil has certain psychological hallmarks. It removes any qualms the reader might have about the rightness of the protagonists' efforts to defeat them--or the legitimacy of the power structures that enable such efforts, or for that matter the reader's own complicity in systems that do harm--but it seems to have little to do with the actual reasons why people might do harm to each other.

In the early books set in the Bedlam's Bard/SERRA universe, the Unseleighe Court is a handy source of antagonists. While in *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows*, the antagonist Perenor is a rogue Seleighe Court elf, the Unseleighe Court in *Born to Run* is depicted, in word if not in deed, as an entire Sidhe nation driven by their hatred of humans. Sidhe Lord Keighvin Silverhair says of them:

They hate you, one and all[.] [...] There are elves among them; and many, many things straight out of your worst childhood nightmares: bane-sidhe, boggles, trolls, things you've never heard of. The Morrigan is their Queen, and a terrible creature she is: she hates all things living, even her own people. [...] They hate us, too, for wanting to co-exist with you; they're constantly at war with us. They want

you gone, and they're active in fostering anything that kills you off. If you run across a human conflict that seems senseless, often as no, they have a hand in it. Not that you humans aren't adept at creating misery for yourselves, but the Unseleighe Court has a vested interest in fostering that misery, and in propagating it.⁵⁸⁷

Of course, Keighvin may be biased, and there are reasons to disagree with him, not least because of the Sidhe dependence on humans for culture, but there is no indication in these early novels that Lackey means for the reader to be critical of his statements.

Evil here is encoded biologically--the prospect of switching courts is not acknowledged as a possibility until *Beyond World's End*, written in 2000--and also geographically. When Tannim tells Sam Kelly about Underhill, he says:

Mostly it's a kind of chaos, a place where things are always changing, always dangerous, and that's where the Unseleighe Court creatures go. Then there's stretches of order, walled gardens or even small countries, and that's where the Seleighe Court enclaves are. [...] Figure every description you've ever heard of Elvenlands, Morgan Le Fay's castle, the Isles of the Blest--that's what those Underhill enclaves are like.⁵⁸⁸

In Chapter 3 I mentioned Lackey's attitude towards weapons and the possibility of attack, characterizing it as congruent with America's dominant narrative of itself. I would argue further that this idea of the Seleighe Court as islands of civilization surrounded by evil,

⁵⁸⁷ Lackey and Dixon, *Born to Run* 50.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. 72.

chaotic lands filled with evil people motivated by an all-consuming hate is congruent with a particularly conservative version of America's story of itself. In later novels, that will change--*Spirits White as Lightning* in particular posits regions of Underhill outside the Seileighe Courts that are neutral, even benign--but Lackey's initial vision is the world of swords-and-sorcery, displaced to Underhill.

This is supported by Kelly's response:

Terrorists and fanatics who threatened folk just because they were American frightened him; there was no predicting people like that, and there was something cold and impersonal about their enmity. Give him a real, honest enemy every time. You knew where you stood with a real enemy; you knew whose side you were on. After all, hating a country takes away its faces, but hating someone because of what he did was something he could get a grip on.⁵⁸⁹

By this time, the novel has established that Kelly is of a conservative bent, and over the course of the novel his views on street kids and the pressures affecting them are challenged. There arises no challenge, however, to the idea that terrorists threaten people just because they are American, and no explanation for the Unseileighe Court's hatred.

The wrong that the Unseileighe Court does in *Born to Run*--selling drugs, sexually assaulting exploited teens, and selling tapes of the assaults as pornography--is arguably a function of callous disregard for humans, but it does not quite act like hatred. The Unseileighe villains have begun this venture because they need "money to pay for the

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid. 51.

private detectives and to buy property. Money to buy arms to ship to both sides of a fight, be it a simple gang-war or full-fledged terrorism. Money to bribe officials, or those whose power was not official but no less real.”⁵⁹⁰ Like the Seleighe Court, they have to earn real money to be able to act in the human world, but if one is unencumbered by concern for human beings, then illegal acts are far more profitable.⁵⁹¹

So far, this is greed, exacerbated by disregard for human well-being, and a sense of malicious mischief. Their work is criminal, but it is not plausible as the work of people who want humans gone. In fact, it is the work of people who in their own way *depend* on humans, both as a subject of and a market for their work.

Moreover, although the Sidhe are allegedly unable to create, even morally reprehensible filmmaking looks an awful lot like creativity. Underage sadomasochistic snuff porn is about as unethical as one can get, but the amount of attention that Aurilia nic Morrigan, Vidal Dhu, and Niall mac Lyr pay to the plots, settings, and historical accuracy of their films bespeaks a labour of love.

(It is hard to know how much of this is deliberate and how much is authorial naïveté. The attention to detail is a negatively informed attribute: the reader sees Aurilia nic Morrigan lovingly contemplating a set for a historical piece on a sadistic doctor who used the cover of the Chicago World’s Fair to lure and murder young women. She reflects that the details of his capture are not important to the film because in this version, “[t]hey would use only the bare bones of the original story--and it certainly would not end in the doctor’s capture.”⁵⁹² This *sounds* like it is meant to be careless and slapdash, but

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. 106.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid. 108.

⁵⁹² Ibid. 106.

Hollywood films get away with much of the same--like Cordelia Bryce-Coll's little whisperers, a case of villains behaving admirably, with malice.)

The films are financed by Sidhe gold, which, unlike paper money, can be reproduced magically without provoking too much investigation. One wonders--if the Unseleighe Court has access to unlimited supplies of gold, why do they need to work to make money? And if one accepts the answer that they work not for the money but to further human strife, why do they do it on such a small scale?

Strange as it may seem--especially coming from Lackey, who is at the opposite end of the political spectrum on many issues--the Unseleighe Court's inefficient and petty war on the human race may have its roots in the "Satanic Panic" that swept through America in the eighties and early nineties, and persists in a much smaller subculture today. The Satanic Panic charged that Satanism was widely but secretly practiced in America, and that Satanists had infiltrated many American corporations and institutions, sacrificing and abusing tens of thousands of children and spreading their secret Satanic agenda. The panic began with the McMartin Preschool case, the most expensive criminal case in American history, in which seven preschool teachers were charged with three hundred and twenty-one counts of child abuse, with all charges being dropped in 1990.⁵⁹³ The scare was based on the testimony of alleged victims in this and other cases, and was promulgated principally on one hand by Evangelical Christian institutions, and on the other by overzealous therapists who then involved law enforcement officials, parents, and the media. Over time, it was found that the claims being made were not only unsupported by

⁵⁹³ "McMartin Preschool Trial," Wikipedia, 18 August 2013, 27 August 2013
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McMartin_preschool_trial>. I have used Wikipedia in this case as a source of the most up-to-date information.

physical evidence, but fundamentally untenable: there was no sign of the thousands of ritual murders allegedly being committed every year, for example, and one of the warning signs that ritual abuse had occurred was a lack of memory of experiencing ritual abuse. The techniques used to question children suspected of being victims were deeply flawed and created false memories. Catherine Gould writes, from the heart of the panic:

Therapists who treat ritually abused children often discover the need for a wider variety of toys than they previously found necessary. The better the toys symbolize the ritually abusive situation, the more effective the child is likely to be in representing the abuse through play. Cages and coffins, ropes, knives and guns, policemen and police cars, doctor kits with medicine bottles and syringes, pots for potions, and occult type figures such as witches, devils, monsters, and the like all constitute equipment important for ritually abused children to have available as they attempt to act out through play the things that happened to them.⁵⁹⁴

Playing with coffins, guns, and devils limits the kinds of stories that a child can tell through play, leaving no way to tell the truth--that ritual abuse is a fiction.

On the fringes of this movement, parents in panic-afflicted areas were known to keep their children home from school. For those for whom it was a more central concern, one could safeguard oneself by harassing and surveilling anyone who looked or acted out of the ordinary or practiced a different religion, by rigorously practicing Christianity, by

⁵⁹⁴ Catherine Gould Ph.D., "Diagnosis and Treatment of Ritually Abused Children," *Out of Darkness: Exploring Satanism and Ritual Abuse*, eds. David K. Sakheim and Susan E. Devine (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), 241.

trusting only explicitly Christian institutions, and by boycotting companies who worked to secretly advance the Satanic agenda.⁵⁹⁵ Among the purveyors of said agenda were *Star Wars*, whose Jedi training paved the way for demon possession; Starbucks and Procter & Gamble, whose logos contained occult symbols; and numerous rock bands, whose lyrics, when played backward, revealed subliminal Satanic messages.

Born to Run was written at a time in America when many Americans believed that a secret war was being waged against them by evil forces, and that these evil forces got at them through their coffee, their soap, their daycare, and their entertainments. Whether the enemy's chosen methods were sensible or effective was entirely beside the point; the point was the harm done, and the need to organize along certain lines to combat it. David Frankfurter notes that therapists at the time--apparently acting in good faith--used that combat to act out their own very compelling stories, driven by portrayals of evil in fiction:

By such confident means of interpretation, adult psychotherapists, like child advocates and social workers, expanded their professional roles from healing specialists, trained in the focused and self-critical resolution of individual cases, to moral crusaders and experts in the detection of evil. This transformation certainly involved, on the one hand, personal convictions and predilections to authority on the part of these emergent experts, and on the other hand, a context of new social crises and panics that required new leadership roles. Yet my interest here has been in the construction of the expert discerner of evil: her innovative techniques, her articulation of conspiracy, her sense of embattlement by a powerful adversary, her

⁵⁹⁵ The goal of which was to undermine morality and take over America, which many Evangelical sources also argued had already been done, so in strictly rational terms the goal was unclear.

tireless crusade in multiple fora and media, and--a key feature in the 'performance' of expertise in this panic--her identification with, even embodiment of, the victim, such that audiences would not see a crusader or fanatic but a heroic and passionate revealer of conspiracy.

It is in this social context that an ancient, ultimately theological concept of evil threat, carried in ecclesiastical tracts on heresy (and then revitalized in popular form in movies like *The Exorcist* {1973} and *The Devil's Rain* {1975}) came to dominate secular professional worlds. And yet, as we have seen, this reappearance of Sabbat-type images of Satanic perversion did not represent a shift from evangelical Christian ideology but rather its increasing influence on American and British popular and professional cultures during the 1980s.⁵⁹⁶

In 1992, this kind of battle would have resonated with many readers, even those critical of the Satanic Panic itself.

After *Born to Run*, the Unseleighe Court disappears from the SERRA/Bedlam's Bard universe for eight years. When it resurfaces in *Beyond World's End*, it has changed. Unseleighe Sidhe Lord Aerune mac Audelaine began as a Seleighe Court elf, but Seleighe Court elves tend to shy away from strong emotion, arguing that their long lives lend it a destructive power it would not otherwise have. A passionate man, he changed his allegiance to the Unseleighe Court, serving them in secret as a double agent. He cared nothing for humans either way until he fell in love with Aerete of the Seleighe Court, who urged peace between the two races, and then was killed in battle by a human's Cold Iron

⁵⁹⁶ David Frankfurter, "Satanic Ritual Abuse: Secular Discerners," *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Ritual Abuse in History* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 2006), 65.

spear. His grief led him first to wage war on the Seleighe Court, and when that failed, he began to target humans:

These he could kill, if he was careful, but no matter how many he killed there were always more to take their place. They called him Arawn, Lord of Death--but even as they cowered in terror from his Hunt, they fought back in a thousand other ways, breeding like the vermin they were, challenging the Sidhe in their Groves and high places. [...] With love and iron, mortal Man bound and banished its elder brothers, the Sidhe, until at last the Courts fled the Old World entirely, searching for a place where they could take up the Old Ways unmolested. And Aerune fled with them, wrapped in his hatred and pride.

But Man--arrogant, presumptuous Man--followed the Sidhe even across the Great Water, destroying the ties the Bright Court forged with the mortalfolk of this new land. Destroying the mortalfolk as well, in a slaughter that would have gladdened Aerune's heart if it had only been his own work. At last elvenkind was banished into the shadows of this world, its foothold a tenuous one, its vast empire shrunken to a handful of *hames*.⁵⁹⁷

The Sidhe did not migrate *with* Europeans, but fled human persecution to the New World. Although Lackey is critical of the genocide of Indigenous people, the Sidhe narrative, at least as related by Aerune, is the American narrative, beginning with the flight from persecution and ending with fears of hordes of destructive, hyper-fertile immigrants.

⁵⁹⁷ Lackey and Edghill, *Beyond World's End* 114-115

In the Bedlam's Bard universe, just as creative people have been attracted to the Seleighe Court elves on the American west coast, Aerune has cultivated "a vast dark iron city that the mortalkind had crafted out of blood and betrayal and the dreams he had sent them, filled with pain and sorrow and suffering enough to glut even a rapacious Unseleighe Lord."⁵⁹⁸

Aerune sees Seleighe Court hames adapting to the human world, and ponders ways in which he can use humans to defeat first the Seleighe Court, and then humanity itself.⁵⁹⁹ In *Beyond World's End*, he has located his realm "underneath" Central Park, and requires both massive amounts of power and the services of a Bard to establish a doorway between his world and the human world. When Threshold begins testing its new drug on street people, Aerune finds his source of power in the untrained mages the drug creates. His meddling with Threshold allows the new mages to follow him Underhill, threatening the last refuge of the Sidhe.

This Unseleighe Court is different from its earlier incarnation in Lackey's work. They have political and aesthetic differences with the Seleighe Court, but are embittered against humans by colonialism and genocide--however, unlike humans who have suffered the same, they have escaped to thrive elsewhere with their culture and institutions largely intact, and have several physical and material advantages over humans. Although earlier I mentioned that the aggression of the Unseleighe Sidhe can be read as an example of thwarted privilege, in that they are far more powerful than humans, and one of the arguments they bring to bear is that by rights they are the species that should dominate,

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid. 118.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. 117.

they are also among the Lackey villains who react to injustice, even as their own actions perpetuate or legitimize that injustice.

In *Mad Maudlin*, matters are complicated further by the introduction of Jachiel, an Unseleighe Sidhe child. While in *Born to Run* Keighvin tells Sam Kelly that children among the Sidhe are rare, so all children are precious to them⁶⁰⁰, Unseleighe Sidhe Aurilia nic Morrigan, Vidal Dhu, and Niall mac Lyr build their business around exploiting human children. In *Mad Maudlin*, however, Eric recalls that “*all* elves valued children, any children[.]”⁶⁰¹ Rionne ferch Rianten, Jaycie’s Unseleighe-Court-appointed protector, follows Jaycie to New York City and finds herself protecting--or at least avenging--human children.⁶⁰² The climax of the novel is a standoff in which Rionne is conjured by the false Guardian cult, after Fafnir threatens a child in order to summon her. Even when Jaycie bursts into the room and reveals himself, Rionne has to be assured repeatedly that the human child will not be harmed before she will devote all of her attention to Jaycie.

One of the ways that human cultures have typically depicted each other as less human or less civilized is to charge that the culture victimizes, sacrifices, or indoctrinates children. Charges of child sacrifice have, in the past, been levelled against Catholic people, Jewish people, and the businesses and institutions targeted by the Satanic Panic. That it would initially be said of the Unseleighe Sidhe is unsurprising, but it is also reasonable that upon reflection--especially after 9/11, when the politics of representing difference changed drastically--the charge would be withdrawn.

⁶⁰⁰ Lackey and Dixon, *Born to Run* 46.

⁶⁰¹ Lackey and Edghill, *Mad Maudlin* 495.

⁶⁰² Actually, she has been shaped into the incarnation of Bloody Mary documented in "Myths Over Miami," a 1997 newspaper article about the curiously compelling Bloody Mary myth cycle that arose among children in Miami homeless shelters. Lackey's treatment dispels much of the raw power of the original myths, in part by subsuming them into the Bedlam's Bard universe.

Unlike de Lint, who began with a functional definition of mythical evil and has spent his career continually modifying it, Lackey has moved from a biological/geographical definition of mythical evil towards more functional definitions that still attempt to preserve moral evil as a category of behaviour. However, in a world where paranoia is warranted, where it is sometimes necessary for good people to use violence, and where sometimes it is even morally permissible to enjoy it (as when Eric's partner Beth Kentraine bashes in Ria Llewellyn's skull with her guitar, thereby cutting off Perenor's source of magical power and incidentally exacting revenge for trying to steal Beth's boyfriend), these functional definitions have to be arrived at carefully. Recall, however, that Lackey has a sharply limited amount of time in which to work. In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned that Lackey has developed a moral shorthand to indicate which characters are villains, and why the protagonists' actions against them are justified. Very often, while villains will demonstrate callous disregard for people in general, Lackey will underscore their badness by depicting them either as sexist or as engaging in blood sacrifice in order to gain power or use magic.

Although these two markers have roughly the same function, they fulfill it in different ways. I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that Lackey's negotiations with her readers are different from those performed by the other authors in this study, and this is one such example: in a country where a sizeable subset of the population considers all magic to be evil, Lackey needs a clear and quick way to demarcate the line between good magic and bad magic. The method she has hit upon serves the additional purpose of telling the reader which are the bad characters, and of being so heinous that there will be no question of the fairness of the actions of the protagonists.

Blood sacrifice is one of the things that separates the Unseleighe Court from the Seleighe Court, even in the newer books that grant the former greater complexity. In *Born to Run*, Vidal Dhu, Aurelia nic Morrigan, and Niall mac Lyr feed on the energy of the humans they torture and kill on film. In *Beyond World's End*, Aerune mac Audelaine uses the humans whose psychic gifts have been unleashed by T-Stroke, both to heal himself and to power his creation of a gateway into the mortal world.

Among his magical servants, however, is a redcap named Urla, and Urla and his ilk present another puzzle. Redcaps are less intelligent Sidhe who survive by dipping their caps in the blood of their victims. Staking out Threshold Labs at Aerune's behest, it--not he, but *it*--"comforted itself with fantasies of a gluttonous feeding, one that might slake even the redcap's eternal hunger, for there were many within the yellow building filled with terror and such a burning despair that it made Urla's mouth water."⁶⁰³ Urla apparently requires the pain of others to survive, as a fact of biology. The difference between this biologically encoded evil and the destructive choices of Aerune is never fully explored: hames appear to be shaped by the will of their creators, so Aerune may have made the creatures within, including Urla; or it may merely be an unquestioned holdover from previous ideas of the Unseleighe Court in Lackey's fiction.

Sexism, the other element of this shorthand, does something different. While blood sacrifice is presumably outside of the realm of experience for most of Lackey's readers, sexism is not, and it still finds expression in popular culture and in politics. In Lackey's universe, sexism comes from the minds or the mouths of already clearly villainous characters. Robert Lintel has already spent most of *Beyond World's End* conducting illegal

⁶⁰³ Lackey and Edghill, *Beyond World's End* 147.

and unethical experiments on human beings when he thinks to himself, seeing Jeanette Campbell's (reasonable) reaction to Aerune mac Audelaine, "*So she's bolted. Da widdle girly got scared and ran. Jesus, isn't that just like a woman?*"⁶⁰⁴ Lord David Alderscroft's thralldom to Lady Cordelia manifests not as simple rejection of Isabelle during their youth, but as misogyny and classism. His breaking of the enchantment consists, in part, of learning to care for her again. Sexism becomes such a ready indicator of evil in Lackey's work that it seems like a kind of bad magic in itself.

There are two problems with this approach. One is that, as I mentioned, sexism still exists, and some readers may be accustomed to thinking of men and women as inherently different, a belief that they hold in good faith. For these readers, there is little attempt to argue for anything different; just the association of sexism with evil.

It could be said, in Lackey's defense, that the kind of sexism her antagonists espouse is of an extreme form that even readers with the greatest investment in traditional gender roles will recognize as problematic. But this representation of extreme sexism also does nothing to address the reasons why people might hold these beliefs in good faith, or treat the subtler kinds that appear in the world. Lackey's work continually states that sexism is bad, but its only tool of persuasion is caricature that has little to do with the sexism that readers may face or themselves support: what first looks like social critique becomes, upon examination, largely self-referential.

I have shown that through Lackey's work runs an undercurrent of preoccupation with security, potential enemies, and the Other; and that her concern for social justice

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid. 290. Italics original.

notwithstanding, these concerns are expressed in largely binary terms, with little middle ground. Under these circumstances, it is useful and highly interesting to examine the way in which Lackey deals with the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center attacks, an event that propelled the world “evil” back into the common currency.

In the post-9/11 world of *Mad Maudlin*, Lackey transitions from the *Born to Run* frame in which terrorists hate America for being American to a frame in which certain actions of the government deserve critique, and even if it is not made explicit, the seeds of terrorism are acknowledged. Although *Summoned to Tournay* involved antagonism from the American federal government, the threat was an unethical scientist who was then possessed by predators from another dimension. Parker Wheatley of the Paranormal Defense Initiative is more concerned with security and intelligence. A minor character in *Spirits White as Lightning*, he was paranoid about aliens. Now he takes advantage of the new anti-terrorist climate in Washington. With Aerune mac Audelaine defeated, he is desperate for intelligence about elven activity, so he kidnaps and tortures Marley Bell, a seller of occult books. Under torture, Bell first tells the truth, but this is not good enough for the PDI agents, and he begins to lie to please them. However, Ria Llewellyn learns of the kidnapping and uses her own government contacts to break into the PDI, stage a rescue, and have Wheatley’s organization decommissioned. In other words, Wheatley’s paranoid fantasies about a Sidhe enemy lead him to commit atrocities--fruitlessly--against the people he is supposed to be protecting, and ultimately lead to his own downfall.

Ria is half-Sidhe herself, and although she responds violently to Wheatley, Lackey depicts her response as clearly just--even though the same set of actions, framed differently, could be called terrorism. But Ria enjoys power, wealth, privilege, and the best

advantages of both humans and Sidhe. An American in such a position is unlikely to be linked to terrorism; and Ria's familiarity with power allows her to wield it deftly and effectively, so that her resistance is framed as heroic.

Conclusions

Although Lackey tends to default into binaries, and her novels posit a vision of the world in which those who are civilized and benevolent must continually guard themselves against outsiders who would do them harm for the fun of it, her careful handling of the Unseleighe Sidhe and Parker Wheatley indicate that she is not firmly wedded to all aspects of the moral scheme she proposes. Whether she must work too quickly to be able to interrogate it, whether her reliance on collaborations leads her to make decisions that she is certain will be acceptable to her collaborators with minimal negotiation, or whether she sees her work as didactic in a way that is best served by moral simplicity, she has a fall-back position that valorizes simplicity, eternal vigilance, and policing. The kinds of policing she depicts are magically incapable of acting unjustly or mistakenly acting against the innocent--magic having a sense of justice that apparently agrees with Lackey's own. This acknowledges the fallibility of real-life policing; however, Lackey's dedication pages explicitly link this magical policing to real policing.

Accordingly, the evil that protagonists battle in Lackey's urban fantasies is never ambiguous, or thoughtless, or well-intentioned but mistaken. It is possible to do harm thoughtlessly or with good intentions--the myriad parents who drive young characters onto the streets by pushing them to overachieve or by treating them as accessories are a

good example--but those who do so are never villains themselves, although their actions make the actions of the villains possible. Lackey's villains do harm mindfully and willingly, often with a measure of glee. A villain who does not fit this pattern, who has qualms about what he or she does, is always given the opportunity for reform, and always accepts it.

Although Lackey's fiction argues for the existence of evil in the real world, and the prospect that humans would willingly and knowingly act in the service of elemental evil, the argument is not a very convincing one. Evil rather appears to exist in the novels as a hero's dragon, there only to justify the actions of the protagonists. Lackey embraces a traditional fantasy aesthetic of swords and armour and heroic battles, but translates it to the modern urban world; at the same time, she is very concerned that her protagonists--and the universe itself--act justly. Blistering magical battles, the use of swords real or illusory, and heroic rides to the rescue on motorcycle-shaped elvensteeds are far less engaging if one worries that the people against which these are brought to bear are complex characters who believe themselves to be acting rightly, or at the very least doing the best they can--but recall that in *The Wizard of London*, the absence of such a battle is a disappointment, even though David Alderscroft is redeemable. Making these characters irretrievably, unambiguously, gleefully bad gives the protagonists license to give themselves--and the reader--over to the thrill of battle without fretting about the ethics of it.

Lackey's work challenges the assertion that urban fantasy sets out to necessarily be more morally nuanced than high fantasy, but even when the author intends for good and evil to be clear and distinct concepts, the urban environment shapes the kinds of evil she can depict. Where a Tolkienesque Dark Lord is present, he must be mediated through

characters who give at least the impression of plausibility in an urban environment: the Ice Lord works through London politicians; the Unseleighe Sidhe lord's efforts are facilitated by a ruthless corporation. I have shown that over time, even the degree of evil which the author is able to attribute to these plausible characters has had to be challenged and revised. The result is that a novel such as *Mad Maudlin* demands not one antagonist but a great confluence of them.

Chapter 7: “I couldn’t be horrified by the impulse. I had to listen, refuse and move on”: Kelley Armstrong

Kelley Armstrong’s fiction features sympathetic portrayals of characters who are traditionally the stuff of horror legend: werewolves, witches, sorcerers, necromancers, and half-demons. These characters centre themselves morally by situating themselves within networks of affinity rather than hierarchical systems.

The moral scheme of Armstrong’s work is less coherent than that of de Lint’s, but it is more coherent than that of Lackey’s. Although essential evil exists and is relatively uncomplicated and unquestioned, it is not the primary antagonist. While, as in Lackey’s work, plots are driven by villains who either operate from a sense of entitlement or appeal to evil to address their own disenfranchisement, their badness is not shaped by absolute evil or by the fears of the audience, in part because the institutions they threaten, and the characters who defeat them, are not to be read as absolutely good. There is even the suggestion that what is initially readable as essential evil is fuelled or facilitated by injustice in which the protagonists partake.

Accordingly, nothing in the universe Armstrong imagines is incomprehensible. People’s behaviour always has an explanation, even if that explanation is, in the case of serial killers, moral monstrosity. This forestalls the possibility of elemental evil, but also the possibility of other, morally neutral kinds of otherness.

Institutions in Armstrong’s work, whether human or supernatural, are universally inherently ambivalent and ambiguous, useful but often oppressive and subject to

corruption. Characters must decide for themselves how to balance their own needs with their ethics and the needs of the institutions they serve.

As I said in Chapter 4, the paranormal romance subgenre tends towards conservatism, in that it frames evil as crime, the solution to which is policing, often through physical violence. The *Women of the Otherworld* series is no exception, but it also critiques the various systems of laws and justice that it depicts--not just their policing wings, but their very underpinnings. Evil is still a property of individuals, but the systems that Armstrong depicts either handle it ineptly, or are responsible for creating it in the first place.

Context and Reception

Armstrong is a Canadian author whose work fits largely in the paranormal romance subgenre of urban fantasy, although she has written five crime novels. Her Canadianness may be a factor that sets her work apart from the general thrust of the rest of the (largely American) subgenre. Her *Women of the Otherworld* series, begun in 2001, is a set of linked narratives featuring protagonists who are “supernaturals” able to pass as human well enough to interact with the mundane world,

Construction of the World

The world of Armstrong’s novels is populated by supernaturals, people with magical abilities. These abilities are occasionally sex-linked: all witches are female and all sorcerers male, not because these are gendered terms but because they are separate species whose

inherited powers do not manifest in the opposite sex.⁶⁰⁵ All werewolves but one are male. Vampires, half-demons, and necromancers can be male or female.

These people are not in and of themselves morally evil, and some of them go to a great deal of trouble to act ethically. Evil is not the result of their biological makeup, but is rather framed as violent crime. Among the conditions that make these crimes possible are supernatural institutions that work very well to serve and protect the supernaturals who can exist comfortably within them, but leave others marginalized and disenfranchised.

The supernatural world is a more dangerous world than that of humans. When half-demon Hope Adams finds herself pointing a gun at someone, she reflects:

I'd never killed anyone.

I could have laughed at the thought, almost a guilty admission, like saying I'd never driven a car. In the normal world, not having killed people is a perfectly acceptable 'missed life experience.' Desirable, in fact. But in the supernatural world, at least in the type of work I did, it's a given that at some point it will come down to kill or be killed.

Karl told me once that he couldn't remember the faces of every man he'd killed. It wasn't that there were scores of them, but enough that they no longer stood clear in his mind. He hadn't said it with regret, but nor had he been bragging.

⁶⁰⁵ In the series, witches first appear to be inherently weaker than sorcerers. In *Dime Store Magic*, however, Savannah Levine reveals that according to her late mother, witches' powers are diminished only because the Covens hide the building blocks of the more powerful spells. Disempowerment masquerades as a concern for ethics.

He was simply making a thoughtful statement during a discussion of risk and death in the supernatural world.⁶⁰⁶

From a craft point of view, of course the world has to be more dangerous for supernaturals; readers come to this genre expecting a certain kind of action motivated by a certain degree of risk, not *The Devil Wears Prada* recapitulated with real devils. This also makes moral choices more pressing--lives hang in the balance--but Armstrong takes care to ensure that this does not mean that they are simpler.

In the opening pages of *Bitten*, Armstrong's first novel, werewolf Elena Michaels, the lone female werewolf, characterizes the typical werewolf's relationship with the mundane world:

By necessity, most werewolves live in the human world. Short of teaming up and creating a commune in New Mexico, they don't have much choice. The human world provides them with food, shelter, sex, and other necessities. Yet, although they may live in that world, they don't consider themselves part of it. They view human interaction as a necessary evil, with attitudes ranging from contempt to barely concealed amusement. They are actors playing a role, sometimes enjoying their turn on the stage, but usually relieved to get off it.⁶⁰⁷

As the series progresses, the reader finds that this is true in varying degrees for the other kinds of supernaturals as well. They live alongside humans, secretly, but form parallel

⁶⁰⁶ Kelley Armstrong, *Personal Demon* (Toronto: Random House, 2008), 179.

⁶⁰⁷ Kelley Armstrong, *Bitten* (Toronto: Random House, 2001), 16.

social systems. Werewolves have the Pack; witches have Covens; sorcerers have Cabals, which serve--and constrain--other kinds of supernaturals. Even the afterlife of supernaturals has a system run by a single Creator and loosely administered by the three Fates of Greek mythology.

Armstrong treats all of these systems with ambivalence. In *Bitten*, Elena starts out willingly living apart from the Pack, determined to function as a human. The Pack does not understand her as a human or a woman, but is the only group of people that understands Elena as a wolf. At the end of the novel, rejected by her human lover, she returns to the Pack, gaining their protection and pledging to act on behalf of their interests.

One of Armstrong's strategies for communicating the ambivalence about systems is introducing a system in one light, through a trusted character, and then undermining that character's interpretation in later novels. There are werewolves that exist outside of the Pack--"mutts." *Bitten* portrays these men as unthinking animals, making the argument that to avoid becoming mindless killers, werewolves need training they can get only through the Pack. At the beginning of *Bitten*, Elena numbers the werewolves in the world as "approximately thirty-five".⁶⁰⁸ The Pack keeps files on each one of the mutts⁶⁰⁹, and when Elena consults them in her search for a mutt causing trouble for the Pack, she begins with twenty-seven names.⁶¹⁰ Although Armstrong never says so explicitly, this means that only eight werewolves enjoy the protection and benefits conferred by the Pack, while over three times that number are consigned to the margins, and denied territory. Elena even credits a Renaissance werewolf who fruitlessly experimented on mutts as being "remarkably

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. 17.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. 59.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. 59.

successful at decreasing the European mutt population.”⁶¹¹ Elena is a sympathetic character, and through her the reader sees how a sympathetic character can tolerate a group being placed under surveillance, prevented from owning land, and subjected to genocide.

But if Elena is comfortable with this, Armstrong proves not to be. *Bitten* is about the revenge of the mutts for their shabby treatment at the hands of the Pack. In a later book, *Personal Demon*, the reader is treated to the point of view of a former mutt. Karl Marsten is one of the mutts who conspire to undo the Pack in *Bitten*, but has a change of heart and is later made a full member of the Pack. In *Personal Demon*, the reader learns, along with Hope Adams, that Karl is the son of a mutt father who was killed by the Pack.⁶¹² The Pack has its own reasons for treating mutts as it does, and in some cases those reasons might be well founded...but mutts have very good reasons for rejecting the Pack, too.

Where the Pack is introduced as a good and sensible institution whose dark side gradually becomes visible, Cabals are introduced the other way around: in *Stolen*, sorcerer Isaac Katzen is in league with the humans who have captured supernaturals. He is said not to “associate with ‘lower races’”⁶¹³, and witch Ruth Winterbourne tells Elena that sorcerers are a “[n]asty bunch[...] No sense of themselves as part of anything greater. An absolute absence of altruism.”⁶¹⁴ In *Dime Store Magic*, when Ruth’s daughter Paige Winterbourne meets sorcerer Lucas Cortez, she scorns him as a sorcerer, but he redeems himself by helping her and distancing himself from the brutal profit-driven Cabals, whom he has dedicated his legal career to fighting.

⁶¹¹ Ibid. 60.

⁶¹² Armstrong, *Personal Demon* 267.

⁶¹³ Kelley Armstrong, *Stolen* (Toronto: Vintage Canada/K.L.A. Fricke/Random House, 2009), 177.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid. 178.

As the series progresses, it becomes clear that, as with the Pack's goodness, the idea of the Cabals' evil is too simple. True, Cabals are rigidly hierarchical and misogynist, with the best spots reserved for sorcerers, and leadership decided by succession. They do not shy from using intimidation and murder as enforcement tactics. But they also provide security, resources, and services for supernaturals who cannot rely on human social structures to meet their needs. Lucas Cortez, who once vowed to bring down the Cabals⁶¹⁵ but has since relaxed into representing supernaturals against them, reflects:

Cabals do provide scores of supernaturals with a world in which they belong. One cannot underestimate the importance of that for people who otherwise spend their lives hiding. People who have to look at their bleeding child and evaluate the risk of taking him to the doctor. Of those people who smile and nod at my father every day, 90 percent are truly grateful and free of fear.

If they betray the Cabal, the punishment will be execution--horrible execution--but they have no intention of doing so. Yes, they've heard stories of families being murdered, but those are other Cabals. Yes, they've also heard of Cortez Cabal employees being killed after leaving the organization, but that is the price you pay for reaping the benefits. One of those benefits is security, and if the Cabal must kill a former employee to safeguard its secrets, so be it.

⁶¹⁵ Armstrong, *Personal Demon* 183.

So is a Cabal evil? No. Is there evil within a Cabal? Absolutely. That's what I fight--the greed and corruption that arises from an environment where all you have to do is cry 'security issue' and you can get away with murder.⁶¹⁶

Witches, on the other hand, are organized into Covens. Lucas Cortez lays out the two competing histories:

Witches and sorcerers are historical enemies, a ridiculous prejudice that carries over to this day. According to the witches, they took the less powerful sorcerers under their wings, taught them stronger magic and were rewarded by being thrown to the Inquisition--getting them out of the way so the male spellcasters could rule the supernatural world unopposed. More specifically, it is the original Cabal--the Cortezes--whom they blame as the instigators. Our sorcerer version tells us that witches did indeed help us better hone our innate abilities, but when we became too powerful, they turned us over to the Inquisitors, and we retaliated by doing the same to them. I suspect the truth lies somewhere in the middle.⁶¹⁷

Although less powerful than the Cabals, Covens manage to be conservative and stifling, and have a problematic relationship with other witches. Elena notes, "Outside witches were considered an inferior class, like the mutts. But, unlike us, witches didn't *admit* the others were inferior. Oh, no. According to Ruth, outside witches were poor misguided souls in

⁶¹⁶ Ibid. 183-184.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. 167-168.

need of protection and conversion.”⁶¹⁸ A witch is initiated into a Coven by having her magic bound to it, which makes her less powerful. Adam Guzkowski’s article “Can the Witch Speak? The Supernatural Subaltern in Kelley Armstrong’s *Otherworld*”⁶¹⁹ details the implications of young witch Savannah Levine’s struggle, in *Dime Store Magic*, to conduct an initiation ceremony that will leave her magic unbound and under her own control.⁶²⁰ Witches that exist outside the system, however, are suspect.⁶²¹

For supernaturals, the boundary between life and death is not as absolute as it is for humans, so Armstrong’s work also deals with the afterlife, or one of them. In *Haunted*, the story of Savannah Levine’s deceased mother Eve, there are separate afterlives for humans and supernaturals. Both are overseen by the entity called the Creator. Underneath the Creator, the supernatural afterlife is loosely governed by the three Fates of Greek mythology. The living characters, even the ones who contact the dead, are denied full knowledge of the structure of the afterlife, but necromancer Jaime Vegas muses, “I’m not sure if I see ‘God’ as others would recognize him, but I see someone--a benevolent entity, maybe not as all-powerful as we’d like, but a concerned being with the ability to watch and the power to do something about it.”⁶²² *Haunted* gives the reader greater access to Armstrong’s conception of the afterlife, but there is nothing therein to contradict Vegas’ conjecture.

One failure of Armstrong’s work is that this afterlife of witches and werewolves and sorcerers is mundane and bureaucratic to a degree that is--if the reader will forgive a pun--

⁶¹⁸ Armstrong, *Stolen* 71.

⁶¹⁹.

⁶²⁰ Adam Guzkowski, “Can the Witch Speak? The Supernatural Subaltern in Kelley Armstrong’s *Otherworld*,” *The Canadian Fantastic in Focus: Proceedings of the Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy, 2005-2013*, ed. Allan Weiss (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2014), 177

⁶²¹ Ibid. 180.

⁶²² Kelley Armstrong, *No Humans Involved*, (Toronto: Seal Books/K.L.A. Fricke/Random House, 2008), 81.

dispiriting. Eve's partner, Kristof Nast, who is also a ghost, works there as a lawyer.⁶²³

Unless a person has behaved badly enough to merit a hell dimension, he or she can use numeric codes to teleport at will through different planes of existence. Early on in *Haunted*, a number of these planes are mentioned in asides, but action in the book is confined mainly to the mundane world, where the dead are ghosts, largely invisible and unable to interact with the world; the Fates' throne room and adjoining rooms, which give the impression of being vast white marble offices; and the ghost world, where the majority of denizens do whatever they like, unconstrained by physical limitations such as pain, hunger, fatigue, or the need to fit in with humans. "Whatever they like" seems to consist largely of LARPing. There does not appear to be room in Armstrong's universe for the sublime or the ineffable.

Angels work for the Fates, as enforcers. Armstrong is ambivalent about them, too: Eve is recruited by the Fates to track down a murderous demon precisely because angels are crippled by their inborn inability to break rules. Moreover, although they have the power to end a guilty person's life with the Sword of Judgment, their jurisdiction is otherwise restricted to the afterlife: when Eve learns that a man on death row is innocent, she appeals to her angelic partner, Trsiel, who replies, "This justice belongs to the living. [...] We can only right it after they've exacted it. He'll see his freedom soon enough, on the other side."⁶²⁴ Living people are not even allowed to know about the existence of angels.⁶²⁵

Demons, on the other hand, seem to have free traffic with the mundane world. Cacodemons--of whom Lucifer is one--enjoy spreading chaos, and come to Earth

⁶²³ Kelley Armstrong, *Haunted*, (Toronto: Seal Books/K.L.A. Fricke/Random House, 2005), 17.

⁶²⁴ Ibid. 99.

⁶²⁵ Armstrong, *Haunted* 113; Armstrong, *No Humans Involved* 182.

occasionally to father children who inherit their powers.⁶²⁶ Cacodemons spread what Armstrong calls chaos, but what might best be interpreted as malice or intentional harm. (However, it is hard to call the production of gifted children an outright harm.) Eudemons are more cerebral; one tells Vegas, “It’s almost impossible to summon us. We can’t create you. We are, you might say, neutral. Indifferent, even. To both your joys and your suffering. You do not interest us...except in the most academic way.”⁶²⁷ This eudemon helps Vegas to solve the murders of a group of children, not for the sake of the children, but because it presents an interesting intellectual puzzle.⁶²⁸ “Caco-” and “eu-” are Greek prefixes meaning “bad” and “good” respectively, but in this context they seem to be vast oversimplifications. In fact, when Eve and the angel Trsiel encounter cacodemon Dantalian, Dantalian foregrounds the difference between moral wrong and mythical evil by telling the angel, “You do like your stories, don’t you, Trsiel? The virtuous angel warrior and the nefarious demon battling for the soul of the innocent. Yet she’s not so innocent. And you’re not so angelic. Perhaps I’m not so demonic. But that spoils a good story, doesn’t it?”⁶²⁹

The afterlife’s hell dimensions constitute another aspect of the overarching concept of justice. Leah O’Donnell, the half-demon who killed Paige Winterbourne’s mother and tried to kidnap Savannah Levine, is in one.⁶³⁰ The Nix, a demon who found a way to possess humans, is in one.⁶³¹ Interestingly, both find ways to escape. This likens hell to

⁶²⁶ Armstrong, *No Humans Involved* 93.

⁶²⁷ Ibid. 93.

⁶²⁸ Ibid. 95.

⁶²⁹ Armstrong, *Haunted* 293.

⁶³⁰ Kelley Armstrong, *Waking the Witch* (Toronto: Seal Books/K.L.A. Fricke/Random House, 2010), 296.

⁶³¹ Armstrong, *Haunted* 11.

prison more than any Aligherian realm of tortured souls, which is in keeping with the framing of evil as crime.

As part of her mission to recapture the Nix, Eve visits the dimension reserved for serial killers, and finds quaint little cottages in an idyllic wooded glen.⁶³² The hell, she discovers shortly, is in the people who reside there. They have no memory of their crimes, partly so that they are unable to revel in those memories, and partly in case “their lives were warped by extreme circumstances, such as early abuse”⁶³³, giving them the opportunity to reform, although this is rare. It does not appear to have occurred to any celestial agents of justice that placing someone in a village full of serial killers might not be conducive to reform.

Recall that in Mercedes Lackey’s fictional universes, justice is woven into the fabric of an otherwise hostile world, and maintained by magically chosen enforcers (who are extradiegetically linked to real-life policing organizations). In Armstrong’s universe, on the other hand, while there is an overarching concept of justice, it is not absolute, or even very powerful. It is capable of making mistakes and getting bogged down in bureaucracy, it is more complicated than it looks, and as Eve Levine illustrates, sometimes the structures designed--not by humans, but by the Creator--to serve justice cannot do so within the parameters set out for them. Eve is selected as a bounty hunter not because she is particularly good, but because her personal morality will allow her to do necessary things that the afterlife’s institutional morality will not permit. In a universe where not even hell accommodates snap judgments, earthly systems, even the supernatural ones, are ripe for questioning.

⁶³² Ibid. 345.

⁶³³ Ibid. 337.

In the Women of the Otherworld series, the structures of power are never simple. Neither are these power structures above reproach, and it is right and good for the protagonists to challenge them.

Role of the City

Armstrong's work is not confined to any particular city, but involves cities all over North America: Toronto, Portland, Boston, Chicago, Miami, and Savannah are a few. However, cities are less woven into the fabric of the story. Lackey's New York and San Francisco, de Lint's Ottawa and Newford, and as we will see, Miéville's London, Beszel, Ul Qoma, and New Crobuzon, play a large role in the setting the tone of the texts. *Bitten* begins in a very distinctive Toronto, but by and large, Armstrong's cities are just backdrops for action that is usually confined to urban environments: gang activity, visits to corporate-style cabal headquarters, raves, debutante balls, and television shoots, for example.

The series takes urban life for granted; it is most conspicuous when it is absent. *Waking the Witch* takes place largely in the fictional small town of Columbus, Washington. This community is graced with a vivid description that is, in its own way, laudatory of urban life:

Ghost town was too fanciful a term for Columbus, conjuring up visions of porch swings creaking in the breeze and tattered vintage Coke signs flapping. This place was a zombie, rotting before my eyes, dead but still somehow functioning.

The population sign looked as if it had recently been reduced from four digits to three, even that estimate bearing an air of desperate optimism. I drove past three businesses on the outskirts of town--a boarded-up bowling alley, a used-car lot with three mud-mired clunkers, and a darkened gas station.

The residential streets came next, if one can still call them that when there's little sign of actual residents. Maybe a quarter of the lots bore the kind of tidy postwar homes I'd envisioned. Almost half, though, had For Sale signs, most faded or fallen, all hope abandoned. As for the others, it seemed the homeowners hadn't even been able to work up the confidence to put their house on the market, the yards overgrown, windows boarded up or broken, as if the residents were resigned to the fact they were stuck here, but resentfully, refusing to do even basic maintenance.

[...]

As I rode down Main Street, I started wishing I'd rented a car--something old and rusty, something that would fit in. Normally, I'm all about the attention, but the heads turning my way, the eyes narrowing, the lips tightening, wasn't the kind of attention I needed if I was about to poke my nose into local murders.⁶³⁴

These images of decay and desolation culminate in a portrayal of narrow-minded, judgmental residents, who narrator Savannah Levine imagines are jealous of her. The small town is not an idyllic escape here, but a trap--both figuratively, and for Savannah,

⁶³⁴ Armstrong, *Waking the Witch* 22-23.

literally, as Leah O'Donnell has used it to lure her away from her support system of friends and family in Portland.

Armstrong's kind of urban fantasy is urban in that large parts of it cannot take place anywhere other than in cities. However, the position of supernaturals in relation to the human world means that the multiplicity and hybridity of the city are internalized by the characters, and an integral part of the supernatural community. With lives that place the characters necessarily at variance with human moral codes, supernaturals must work out ethics for themselves, wherever they are. An urban setting does not seem to affect the moral scheme of the novels, but it is friendlier to the presence of supernaturals. Possibly it allows people who have traditionally been cast as villains in a small-town setting to escape such binary formulations and forge their own identities.

Protagonists

Armstrong's protagonists are all female, as the series title would suggest. They all struggle to negotiate their identities in the face of pressures from the abovementioned systems, the human world, their (super)nature, and their own goals and desires. The good that they attempt to serve is not a fixed point, but shifting, multifaceted, and contingent.

i) Elena Michaels

The supernatural romance subgenre of urban fantasy almost always features protagonists who are themselves transgressors. They differ from the antagonists they fight

in that they have the approval, or at least the tolerance, of the establishment they act on behalf of. In this regard, Armstrong's protagonists are no exception. In *Bitten*, Elena Michaels says:

I am cursed to live between worlds. On the one side there is normalcy. On the other, there is a place where I can be what I am with no fear of reprisals, where I can commit murder itself and scarcely raise the eyebrows of those around me, where I am even encouraged to do so to protect the sanctity of that world.⁶³⁵

She has left the Pack, with permission, in pursuit of "ordinary, mediocre dreams of a home, a family, and above all, stability."⁶³⁶ Called back when the Pack is threatened with detection, she continues to struggle against them, and the reader is aware, before Elena herself is, that her assessment of her fellow Pack members has been uncharitable. Even at the end of the book, when she has decided to return to the Pack, she makes it clear that she is not giving up on her "mediocre dreams":

So, realizing that everything I ever wanted was here, was I prepared to cast aside my human aspirations and bury myself in Stonehaven forever? Of course not. I'd always have the need to fit into the larger world. No amount of therapy or self-analysis would change that. I'd still hold a job in the human world, maybe escape

⁶³⁵ Armstrong, *Bitten* 8.

⁶³⁶ Ibid. 16.

there for vacations when the insulated life of the Pack overwhelmed me. But Stonehaven was my home. I wouldn't run from it anymore.⁶³⁷

She goes on to admit that there are aspects of her personality for which it is convenient to blame her werewolf nature, even though she had these traits before she became one. The two identities that Elena has been struggling with are a convenient fiction; the real Elena Michaels has one foot firmly planted in each world.

Erin S. Young points out that as much as Michaels struggles with these two natures, lycanthropy, as depicted in Armstrong's work, articulates a particular kind of women's fantasy, in that it "enables Elena [...] to interrogate and reject traditional 'human' standards of gendered behavior, thereby reflecting the dissolution of stable identities in a flexible capitalist economy"⁶³⁸, and "naturalizes excessive consumption"⁶³⁹ and "the rejection of traditional human values."⁶⁴⁰ Young sees Elena as a new romance heroine, more in keeping with newer models of capitalism that demand, and reward, flexibility. As important as flexibility is in Armstrong's work, however, the thing that Elena consumes to excess most conspicuously is food, and the fantasy of limitless consumption of food likely has roots in Western body image ideals more than in capitalism. Moreover, it is worth reiterating that Armstrong is likely to be as critical of capitalism as she is of every other system.

According to Young, one of the systems *Bitten* in particular is critical of is traditional marriage, citing the issue of Elena's upbringing as an example. Young writes:

⁶³⁷ Ibid. 336.

⁶³⁸ Erin. S.Young, "Flexible Heroines, Flexible Narratives: The Werewolf Romances of Kelley Armstrong and Carrie Vaughn," *Extrapolation* 52:2 (2011): 208.

⁶³⁹ Ibid. 209.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid. 210.

The implication here is that the State's heterocentric decision condemned Elena to a monstrous life; if she had been permitted to live with her mother's unmarried best friend, she wouldn't have endured extensive sexual abuse from State-approved (married) foster fathers, and she wouldn't have been made into a 'monster.' The novel establishes early on that blind reverence for the institution of marriage can lead to arbitrary and potentially harmful decision-making, and that marriage should not be automatically equated with happily ever after.⁶⁴¹

This, Young says, is in contravention of the "rules" of the typical romance, which tests the heroine's ability to function as a wife, mother, and homemaker. Elena does not need to prove herself as a master of domestic space, because as a night-roaming wolf "[s]he encounters homeless men and street thugs, none of whom pose a physical or sexual threat to her well-being. The private sphere, in other words, holds little appeal for a female protagonist who has nothing to fear in public spaces, even during the times when they are most dangerous for women."⁶⁴² Young sums up:

Elena's 'true' self, in other words, is located outside of the physical (and imaginary) space of the home. By extension, it is also located outside of the traditionally gendered roles of 'wife, mother, and homemaker.' Her lycanthropy effectively denaturalizes the domestic sphere, along with its gendered expectations and values.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid. 217.

⁶⁴² Ibid. 219.

As a result of the above analysis, it may seem logical to conclude that the werewolf trope is utilized in this subgenre to remove women from a social and historical legacy of gender-based oppression. Elena's physical enhancements enable her to 'take back the night,' as well as exact vengeance on human men who prey on women and girls.⁶⁴³

However, Young says, seeing lycanthropy as liberation from gender is an oversimplification: the world of werewolves is "hyper-patriarchal"⁶⁴⁴, and Elena, as the only female, is often regarded as "an irresistible challenge and a rare prize".⁶⁴⁵ She is not free from gender, but she is empowered in nonstandard ways.

One of the other areas in which Elena has a complex negotiation to perform with the rest of the Pack is in the realm of ethics. I have already shown that she begins with a significant blind spot when it comes to the Pack and its relationship with the greater werewolf population; however, she does cling to an idea of goodness beyond the Pack. She left the Pack after killing a man who threatened to expose them:

When I awoke, the full impact of what I'd done hit me. No, not so much *what* I'd done, but how I'd done it, how easily I'd done it. I'd killed a man with as much moral compunction as I would have swatted a fly. [...] I'd crossed the line. I'd acted with the single-minded purpose of protecting my Pack, devoid of even a drop of

⁶⁴³ Ibid. 219.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid. 219.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid. 222-223.

compassion or mercy. I'd acted like Clay. That scared me, scared me so bad I'd run and sworn I'd never go back to that life again.⁶⁴⁶

For Elena, valuing the lives of humans is an intrinsic part of asserting her own humanity. It is former mutt Karl Marston, of all people, who in *Personal Demon* presents a similar scheme: "'The wolf doesn't feel sorry for the man, doesn't consider the life he's taking, doesn't think of his wife and children, his mother and father. That's the human's job, and it's the werewolf's job to make sure the humanity in him doesn't disappear.'" ⁶⁴⁷

Elena contrasts these values with the values of Clay, her once and future lover, who "couldn't understand why killing humans was taboo. He didn't slaughter innocent people, any more than the average person would swerve his car to intentionally hit an animal. But if a human posed a threat, his instincts told him to take whatever action was necessary."⁶⁴⁸ When a boy is killed on Pack territory, she finds herself wishing for "a place where dead bodies in the backyard would have been cause for indescribable horror, not quick cleanup plans. I tried to think as Philip would, to feel compassion and grief for that dead boy, a life as full as my own cut short."⁶⁴⁹ Erin Young suggests that *Bitten* draws parallels between the serial killers and the Pack, particularly Clay.⁶⁵⁰ Elena does describe Clay and the other Pack members, in the opening chapters of *Bitten*, in terms that justify Young's identification of them as "a community of serial rapists and killers"⁶⁵¹, but this is not borne out by the rest of the series.

⁶⁴⁶ Armstrong, *Bitten* 46.

⁶⁴⁷ Armstrong, *Personal Demon* 269.

⁶⁴⁸ Armstrong, *Bitten* 75.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid. 100.

⁶⁵⁰ Young 222.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid. 222.

If Elena is critical of the Pack's readiness to kill, and level of comfort with violent death, she is also critical of the human tendency to equate killers with animals. She tells the reader:

Show me the animal that kills for the thrill of watching something die. Why does the stereotype of the animalistic killer persist? Because humans like it. It neatly explains things for them, moving humans to the top of the evolutionary ladder and putting killers down among mythological man-beast monsters like werewolves.⁶⁵²

Michaels' ethics, like the rest of her, must take into account two competing values systems. By embracing both worlds, she abandons the possibility of easy answers.

ii) Eve Levine

Eve Levine, in *Haunted*, is the ghost of a witch and half-demon. Already an outsider among humans because of her Jewish ethnicity⁶⁵³ and supernatural status, she makes choices that exclude her from the witch community and mark her as dangerous, even as she claims to retain a strong personal ethical framework:

I don't have any hang-ups about violence. For a witch in the supernatural world, being powerful meant mastering the dark arts. [...]

⁶⁵² Armstrong, *Bitten* 20.

⁶⁵³ Armstrong, *Haunted* 225-226.

So I'd followed the path of dozens of young witches before me: I'd left the Coven. Left or was kicked out, depending on who you ask. Once gone, I'd devoted myself to learning stronger magic, which meant sorcerer magic, plus the odd black-market witch spell I managed to master. To become more powerful, I had to dig deep into the underbelly of the supernatural world and gain the respect of people who don't respect anything but violence. It became a tool, one I learned to wield with little more concern than I would wield a machete to chop my way out of a jungle.

But the violence I saw in these pages wasn't chopping down your enemies or fighting for survival. This was hate and jealousy and cowardice...⁶⁵⁴

Throughout the novel--including during a comic exchange with the Fates⁶⁵⁵--Eve Levine rationalizes her own behaviour as pragmatism, a stance that the Fates scorn but admit is useful.⁶⁵⁶ Unable to break the rules, they use her to catch the Nix--which is ironically, in itself, the same kind of pragmatic circumvention.

At the end of the novel, in order to defeat the Nix Eve is forced to accept the Fates' offer to make her an angel, an offer she has refused until that moment because it would separate her from her partner. Even then, she straddles worlds: the Fates, citing the example of Persephone, make her an angel for six months of the year, and give her six months with her partner Kristof. Angelhood does not change her much, however: when given the rules that go with her new status, she immediately thinks about ways to break

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid. 120-121.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid. 18-20.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid. 20.

them.⁶⁵⁷ Although she does make progress in her relationships with her daughter and Kristof, the largest change to Eve over the course of the novel appears to be her willingness to think of herself as potential angel material--to think of good and evil in terms other than the ones that she has been given, and employ her pragmatism and her capacity for transgression for the benefit of others.

iii) Jaime Vegas

In *No Humans Involved*, Jaime Vegas is a celebrity medium whose secret is that she is a real necromancer. A necromancer is, of course, by her nature transgressive: she “crosses the boundary between this world and the next.”⁶⁵⁸ Jaime characterizes a necromancer’s existence as “a long, cursed road that ends in madness.”⁶⁵⁹

At the beginning of Jaime’s career, she made a deal with a demon, who got her her apprenticeship in exchange for her contacting the ghost of a serial killer. She muses, “He must have had a supplicant that he wanted to reenact the crimes. Somewhere in the world, people had died horrific deaths, and it was my fault. That was the price I’d paid for fame.”⁶⁶⁰ She is haunted by this, the threat of the madness that took her grandmother, and very literal ghosts--and she struggles with the question of her duty to these:

Tell Gabrielle to bring them all by, like serfs granted an audience with the queen,
telling me their stories, begging for help I couldn’t give? I couldn’t find a killer. I

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid. 445.

⁶⁵⁸ Armstrong, *No Humans Involved* 29.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid. 12.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid. 114.

couldn't help a still-grieving spouse find love again. I couldn't take an inheritance away from an ungrateful child. I couldn't stop an unscrupulous partner from destroying the business they'd built together. Most times, I couldn't even deliver a simple message--at best I'd have a door slammed in my face, at worst I'd be reported for trying to scam the bereaved.

I couldn't handle listening to their pleas, knowing I'd disappoint them.
Selfish, maybe, but every *no* hurt too much.

[...]

I tell myself that I *do* help--not ghosts, but the grief-stricken, with my show. But does it matter how many people I reassure if I raise the false hopes of one? By splashing myself on screen and stage, proclaiming my desire to help the grief-stricken make contact, aren't I lying to the spirits themselves? Misleading them into thinking that of all necromancers, *I'm* willing to help?⁶⁶¹

Counselled by Eve Levine that she owes the ghosts nothing, she ignores or avoids them, except when they can help her, but she aware of this, and troubled by it.

At the same time, Jaime spends *No Humans Involved* on a TV shoot, enduring various indignities in pursuit of her big break. Brought together with two other mediums (media?) to contact the spirit of Marilyn Monroe, she soon discovers that the format is a reality show, they are being taped at all times, and the director is deliberately sowing conflict. Rather than play along, however, Jaime starts helping her would-be competitors, even at the expense of her career. By the end of the novel, she has pledged to give up television, and

⁶⁶¹ Ibid. 125.

spend more time meeting with ghosts, saying, “[I]f this case taught me anything it was that I *wanted* to help, that it hurt more to say no than it did to say ‘I’ll try’ and to fail.”⁶⁶² Over the course of the novel, Jaime’s notion of what is good--and what she should do in relation to that good--moves from the abstract to the deeply personal.

No Humans Involved also introduces the reader to Hope Adams, a half-demon whose power is the ability to detect chaos. She is an ambivalent figure in this novel; Jaime spends some time not quite sure if she can be trusted, and during the endgame, Hope begs to be knocked out, saying, “If they want to kill you, I might not try to stop them. I might even help them.” Jaime muses, “[D]id enjoying chaos make Hope demonic? She had helped us find this group. Never once had she led us into trouble, double-crossed us or done anything to *cause* chaos. She’d honestly seemed to want to help--to find some balance for the impulses she hid.”⁶⁶³ Hope’s own story is told in *Personal Demon*.

iv) Hope Adams

Hope is a wealthy twentysomething socialite of South Asian extraction. She is also the daughter of Lucifer. She not only detects chaos; she is attracted to it, and derives pleasure from it. This is a consistent source of anxiety for her. She works as a tabloid reporter, a field where her powers are useful but afford her no opportunity to foster chaos. When the head of the Cortez Cabal calls in a favour in return for saving her life, however, she finds herself infiltrating a supernatural street gang, and participating in their illegal activities.

⁶⁶² Ibid. 341.

⁶⁶³ Ibid. 313.

A good part of the novel is taken up with her struggle to balance her half-demon nature, her obligations to her Cabal employers, her obligations to the gang, and her own moral code. On her first excursion with the gang, she says of their intended victim, "I knew it wasn't right to call her 'the mark.' She was a woman with a name, one who was about to have her home violated and her possessions stolen just because she was out for the evening trying to take revenge on a philandering husband. But, like an undercover cop, I had to get my hands dirty in this job."⁶⁶⁴ Like Elena Michaels, her way of grounding herself ethically is to remind herself of the personhood of the humans around her, and the implications of her actions. With respect to her half-demon nature and the ethical challenge it presents, she is determined to "[s]uck it up and move on."⁶⁶⁵

The gang's second excursion is to rob a debutante's Sweet Sixteen party. When asked if she ever had such a party, she says, "If I'd even suggested it, my parents would have sat me down for a long talk about the responsibilities of privilege."⁶⁶⁶ It is Hope who suggests that they donate half of the take to women's education in developing countries.⁶⁶⁷ She does this by spinning it into a plan to keep the victims from notifying the authorities.

Later in the novel, when Hope is faced with a gravely injured bodyguard, her control slips, and her moral choices are subsumed by her own biology:

Then there was the man on the floor. Dying... His soul, slipping from his body, the grief and anxiety and fear of the others swirling around him, a cocktail more potent than anything I ever dreamed of. I drank it in, oblivious to my

⁶⁶⁴ Armstrong, *Personal Demon* 50.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid. 23.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid. 79.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid. 89.

surroundings. I couldn't remember how I'd gotten in there. Couldn't remember why I was there. Couldn't even remember who this man was, lying on the floor, dying. All that mattered was that he *was* dying and when he did, the reward would be beyond imagining.⁶⁶⁸

She has to be carried out of the room. This incident serves to drive home what Hope fears, and what her friends have been telling her: that however badly she wants to help her friends, she should not be putting herself in dangerous situations, not just for her own safety but for the safety of others.

As with Elena Michaels and Jaime Vegas, by the end of the book Hope has come to terms with her powers, and has developed a new strategy for fitting them into the kind of life she wants:

I couldn't keep pretending that part didn't exist. I had my demon, and it wasn't evil any more than was [Karl's] wolf. It just wasn't human. It lacked the ability to comprehend the conscious lives of others. It hungered and it desired and it knew nothing else, strove for nothing else but the satisfaction of those hungers and desires. [...] I couldn't be horrified by the impulse. I had to listen, refuse and move on.⁶⁶⁹

In the end, both the demon and her ethics say the same thing: she should kill the surviving Haig brother, who with his brother attacked the Cortez Cabal, and planned to murder the

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid. 225.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid. 359.

Cortez family and many others who plotted against the Cabal. The demon side of her wants the resulting chaos, and indeed the survivor offers this up as a gift. The human side of her is receptive to his pleas not to let the Cabal take him alive, knowing that he has spent his life fleeing them, that this is what he fears most, and that the Cabal will make use of his unique powers for dubious purposes.⁶⁷⁰ She is prevented only by the Cabal. She retreats to her home and her old job in Philadelphia, debt to the Cabal discharged, inner demon somewhat tamed.

Hope's journey is as much about learning and accommodating her limitations as it is about growing into her power. Whenever Hope can, she chooses to do good, but it is a fact of her biology that she is not always free to choose. She must rely on the judgment and assistance of friends, and the one time that she and the demon agree, she is thwarted--and justice arguably derailed. Frustration, loss, and disappointment are balanced somewhat by the securing of a love interest, but also by Hope's palpable relief at being able to leave these questions behind.

v) Savannah Levine

Waking the Witch features Savannah Levine, daughter of Eve and Kristof. A young witch whose refuses to bind her magic to a witches' coven or a sorcerers' Cabal, Savannah has been a disruptive presence in the lives of Paige Winterbourne and Lucas Cortez. Over the course of the series, Savannah grows from twelve to twenty-one. Her teenage years

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid. 362.

were marked by a contempt for humans⁶⁷¹ that has since softened, although she chafes at being underestimated. Left alone to manage the family private investigation business for a week, Savannah finds herself investigating a murder with apparent supernatural overtones.

Savannah Levine is as close as Armstrong ever gets to a lone wolf protagonist: over the course of the novel she occasionally joins forces with two detectives, but eager to prove herself, she keeps Paige, Lucas, and her friend Adam at arm's length. The results are disastrous: the crime has been doctored and copycat murders committed to lure Savannah in, with her enemy counting on her sense of independence and need to prove herself to keep her from calling for help.

Savannah ends up bonding to Kayla, the acutely smart daughter of one of the victims. When she learns that the victims planned to murder Kayla, and were accidentally shot by Kayla's grandmother during the attempt, Savannah promises to keep silent about what really happened, telling the grandmother, "'If it'd been me, I'd have shot Brandi [Kayla's mother and would-be murderer], and it wouldn't have been an accident.'" ⁶⁷² Savannah, like her mother, readily chooses her own moral code over the law.

When Savannah discovers that she has been set up--and slowly poisoned--by the half-demon Leah O'Donnell, Leah gives her a choice between saving herself or bringing Leah to justice. Savannah summons her mother Eve's spirit to haul Leah away, and is rescued by her friends, who give her the antidote. O'Donnell's final act of revenge has been to notify the police of Kayla's grandmother's crime, propelling Kayla into foster care. Racked with guilt, Levine thinks to herself, "I still had my spells, but I'd give them up to fix

⁶⁷¹ Armstrong, *Dime Store Magic* 171.

⁶⁷² Armstrong, *Waking the Witch* 262.

what I'd done. I couldn't bring my mother back, or my father, or Michael, but if I could fix even one thing and give Kayla back her grandmother, I'd gladly give up my powers."⁶⁷³ She dozes off, and wakes with her powers gone. The witch who has spent the series being misanthropic, amoral, and occasionally infuriating, gives up her powers for humans, and is willing to give up her life for the sake of justice.⁶⁷⁴

Sources of Evil

For all their attempts to reframe good to accommodate character types from the horror genre, at first blush Armstrong's books seem to employ very basic and stereotyped ideas of moral evil: the serial killer, the prison escapee, the rich human willing to sacrifice lives for power or science. However, these moral monsters act in tandem with oppressive systems. Sometimes the systems create them, sometimes they merely enable them, and sometimes actions that appear to be monstrous in one light are understandable reactions to treatment at the hands of one of these systems. In some cases, the exploration goes no further; however, in others, Armstrong has taken care to make evil more complicated.

Serial killers are the closest Armstrong gets to anything approaching a depiction of essential evil. In *Bitten*, disenfranchised mutts attack the Pack by biting serial killers, creating werewolves who hunt as humans hunt and adapt quickly to a life of killing. When

⁶⁷³ Ibid. 324.

⁶⁷⁴ In the sequels to *Waking the Witch*, *Spellbound* and *13*, it is revealed that a eudemon stripped Savannah of most of her powers, setting her back to the level of a novice witch, to teach her to be less reliant on her powers and more willing to work as part of a team.

Elena talks about them, their only identifying features are their crimes⁶⁷⁵; in fact, she goes out of her way to strip them of individuality, saying of one of them:

Leblanc could have passed for [fellow serial killer-turned-werewolf] Scott Brandon's older brother, not in any real physical resemblance but in the complete banality of his face, well-groomed, blandly handsome and completely unprepossessing, your quintessential Wall Street WASP, features stripped of any ethnicity or interest.⁶⁷⁶

In this passage, Armstrong is bolder than de Lint or Lackey: although she says that Leblanc's face is stripped of ethnicity, she also specifies that he is a WASP--locating evil in an ethnicity privileged by the dominant culture. However, her description is also dehumanizing. Armstrong can no doubt feel confident that her work is never going to contribute to the systematic persecution (or worse) of the well-groomed, blandly handsome, completely unprepossessing quintessential Wall Street WASP, but her innovation here does not challenge a dominant narrative of evil so much as refocus it on a group not traditionally associated with evil.

In *Haunted*, when Eve Levine goes to the hell dimension that houses serial killers, she does not recognize any of them, and they themselves do not have memories of their crimes. She describes them in grotesque terms, and calls them "bird-man," "club-man," "the werewolf⁶⁷⁷," and "knife-man." Elena Michaels may be eager to distinguish between animals and serial killers, but Eve sees these men solely in terms of weapons and the

⁶⁷⁵ Armstrong, *Bitten* 114, 142, 306.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid. 142.

⁶⁷⁷ He remains in human form, unable to change due to dimensional laws, but she knows him for a werewolf, and his teeth are filed to points.

animals they resemble. Although they have no memory of their criminal pasts, they launch themselves at her almost immediately. This suggests (as the angel Trsiel, earlier on, confirms) that their crimes are not motivated by past trauma, but by some deeper defect that renders them monstrous.

In both novels, serial killers are presented as a sort of moral freakshow: mindless predators, devoid of personality. And although serial killers in fact and fiction are said to work alone, one serial killer is not enough to threaten a supernatural; they must therefore be threatened with hordes of them--faceless hordes in *Bitten*, grotesque hordes in *Haunted*. This idea of serial killers as embodying a motiveless, collective malignance places them in the realm of elemental evil, albeit in a form more like the orcs than like Sauron himself.

In neither case are serial killers interesting enough to sustain an entire novel. Their dimension constitutes only a short episode in *Haunted*. In *Bitten*, the serial killers are the tool of mutts tired of their disenfranchisement at the paws of the Pack. This latter dynamic is the same one that appeared in Lackey's work; however, rather than creating a critique of actual social conditions, Armstrong's portrayal of the oppressed appealing to elemental evil for justice appears to be a critique of oppressive social systems in principle.

Interestingly, the women impelled to kill by the Nix, the spirit that Eve Levine is sent out after, are not often branded with the term "serial killer." Their motives for murder are various. A large number of them--including the abandoned preacher's wife Jolynn, the infanticidal Amanda Sullivan, Lizzie Borden, and Lily the school shooter--kill because of an unsatisfactory relationship with the men in their lives. The only one who *is* called a serial killer, Agnes Miller, kills out of a fanatical belief that a string of unsolved murders will move the authorities of Depression-era Chicago to improve living conditions for the poor. What

makes her more a serial killer than the Nix's other hosts? One possibility lies in the book's noting that while the Nix usually gives women the resolve to kill, Agnes needs only the physical strength to do what she was willing to do anyway. More likely, however, the difference is one of perspective: she is a serial killer because her description is written from the assumed point of view of the Chicago police. Agnes' crimes are the crimes of a serial killer; whether Armstrong intends that to mean that Agnes herself is a serial killer is open for debate. Certainly, she shares little in common with the dehumanized men portrayed elsewhere in the book.

The Nix itself presents another problem. A demi-demon, its job, as mentioned, is to give people the resolve to kill. But in Armstrong's universe, biological identity does not elsewhere translate into moral culpability. This particular Nix, faced with a difficult case in seventeenth-century France, found a way to circumvent one of the rules that bind her species, the rule that says she cannot *compel* someone to kill. As the Fates explain, "[...] Nixen thrive on chaos, and they don't appreciate being summoned without that end reward, so the Nix [...] told the witch where to find a spell that would allow the Nix to take over the witch's body, temporarily, and commit the act herself."⁶⁷⁸ The murder done, the Nix finds itself so enamoured with human life that it will not leave its host, and gets the woman into enough trouble to be executed. For this the Nix is taken into custody by an angel, but after its escape, its time inside a human has fundamentally changed its nature. With the characteristics of both a demi-demon and a ghost, it is as hybrid as half-demon Eve Levine herself, and its need to function in tandem with a human female adds an extra level of complexity.

⁶⁷⁸ Armstrong, *Haunted* 30.

This raises an interesting problem: the Nix is still carrying out her traditional function of giving women the resolve to kill, with the added handicap that she now requires regular infusions of chaos to live.⁶⁷⁹ Does this hybridity somehow make the Nix *uniquely* bad? Or does it simply transfer her into a different jurisdiction, so to speak, while other Nixen face a different kind of justice simply for being the creatures that they are? Both answers are unsatisfactory in the world of the story. Throughout the series Armstrong goes out of her way to repeat that good and evil are not manifested in what one is, but rather in the choices that one makes. Whether the Nix is culpable because it must now carry out its accustomed function in order to survive, or because simply because it is a Nix⁶⁸⁰, this would seem to lead the reader to a more essentialist definition of evil. However, given the other assumptions made in Armstrong's world, it seems reasonable that a creature that is half demon and half serial killer might find acting ethically an uphill battle.

There is also the possibility that the Nix is not being sought and punished for anything to do with its nature or its crimes, but simply because it escaped custody. This is a disturbing possibility, but one consistent with Armstrong's universe, and its ambivalence towards systems. In this case, the Nix's hell dimension is not justice, and whether it deserves to be there becomes a peripheral question. The Fates themselves, by putting it in an unbearable situation, contributed to the Nix's escape, and therefore its subsequent crimes.

An antagonist whose depiction is even more critical of systems is Leah O'Donnell, who repeatedly aligns with the perpetrators of systemic violence. In *Stolen*, Leah appears

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid. 88.

⁶⁸⁰ In which case, why would demons be allowed to roam free?

first as one of Elena Michaels' fellow prisoners in a human-run experimental compound. A sheriff's deputy in Wisconsin and a telekinetic half-demon of the most powerful rank, she co-operates with her human captors. Ignoring a feeling of gut-level wrong⁶⁸¹ at their first meeting, Elena grows to like her, partly because of her compassionate treatment of twelve-year-old Savannah, who seems to be the centre of occasionally deadly poltergeist activity. Only after Elena escapes does she realize that Leah is powerful enough to have managed the poltergeist activity herself, and has been manipulating Savannah in collaboration with the sorcerer Isaac Katzen. Leah is the only one of Elena's antagonists to escape the compound alive. She resurfaces in *Dime Store Magic*, working for the Nast Cabal in a bid to get custody of Savannah, although she finds Cabal employment stifling and tries to betray them.⁶⁸² Paige Winterbourne kills her in the final battle.⁶⁸³ In *Waking the Witch*, O'Donnell escapes her hell dimension, takes possession of a friend of Paige's, and uses him to lure Savannah into danger.

Leah's initial motives for going after Savannah are never clear. Savannah has a lot of untapped power, certainly, but what Leah plans to do with her is anyone's guess. What is interesting are her methods. O'Donnell's ability to manipulate large-scale objects is counterbalanced by an ability to manipulate people. She never appears to be in a position of power, always working co-operatively with humans, or a sorcerer, or a Cabal--recall, her job is sheriff's *deputy*. In short, she is an enthusiastic collaborator in a number of the systems of which Armstrong is critical, and she does so for what appear to be her own ends. Leah is too reprehensible on her own to suggest that Armstrong means her to be a caution

⁶⁸¹ Armstrong, *Stolen* 138.

⁶⁸² Kelley Armstrong, *Dime Store Magic* (Toronto: Random House, 2004), 210-213.

⁶⁸³ Ibid. 343.

about what comes of uncritical participation in oppression, but it is possible to read her the other way around--as a caution to the structures of power, about the type of person that thrives on them.

What makes Leah doubly unsettling is that she is so unassuming. Michaels describes her as having “Dark red hair, green eyes, and enviably clear skin that looked like it had never sprouted a blemish. She radiated vibes of sturdy good health, the sort of woman I could imagine cheerfully manning some National Park outpost.”⁶⁸⁴ Despite Michaels’ quickly ignored gut feelings, Leah gives the impression of being wholesome, friendly, and honest. She is, in short, the threat who could be anyone. However, she also strikes all the notes of Tolkienesque evil in some way or another: she is appealing, her wrongness is--briefly--palpable, she manipulates people to compete with each other, she participates in schemes that dehumanize her fellow supernaturals, and she does literally poison Savannah.

In *Stolen*, the system with which Leah co-operates is a human world of institutionalized violence: a group of humans have banded together for diverse reasons to kidnap, imprison, and research supernaturals, ostensibly for the good of a humanity disempowered by science, as one of the heads of the project tells Elena Michaels:

Science does all the work. People are reduced to technological slaves, dutifully pumping data into computers and waiting for the great god of technology to honor them with results. When the computer age first arrived, people were thrilled. They dreamed of shorter work weeks, more time for self-improvement. It didn’t happen.

⁶⁸⁴ Armstrong, *Stolen* 136.

People today work as hard, if not harder, than they did thirty years ago. The only difference is the quality of the work they perform. They no longer accomplish anything of value. They only service the machines.

[...]

What we propose to do here is return a sense of power to humanity. A new wave of improvement. Not technological improvement. Improvement from within. Improvement of the mind and the body. Through studying the supernatural, we can affect [sic] those changes. Shamans, necromancers, witches, sorcerers--they can help us increase our mental capabilities. Other races can teach us how to make immense improvements in our physical lives. Strength and sensory acuteness from werewolves. Regeneration and longevity from vampires. Countless other advances from half-demons. A brave new world for humanity.⁶⁸⁵

This speech, under a vaguely noble-sounding veneer, recapitulates the structure it criticizes by treating supernaturals as resources rather than people. It also carries echoes of the mindset that William Cronon critiques--that modern culture is dehumanizing, and getting back to nature, or in this case supernatural, is a way of recapturing humanity's authenticity. Moreover, the "solution" of imprisoning supernaturals does not solve the problem as it is stated. Beneath the institutional goals, many of the organizers have personal motives that are arguably what *really* drives the project. While Lawrence Matasumi is genuinely interested in the scientific applications of supernatural abilities, another one of the heads, Sondra Bauer, is frustrated at her lack of power as the female figurehead running her

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid. 145.

father's pulp and paper company, and believes that acquiring supernatural power would make men take her seriously.⁶⁸⁶ And Tyrone Winsloe, who finances the project, is a spoiled, immature software billionaire who frustrates the others by hunting the supernaturals as game. Together they have recruited a large complement of staff--mainly scientists and military-style security--who follow their orders unquestioningly.

Part of the horror stems from the compound itself, located underground in a remote area in Maine. Supernaturals are kept in cells fronted with one-way glass, so that they never know when they are being watched. They are interrogated, and forced to dress in uniforms. Although the encounters that leave Elena injured or traumatized--their pairing her with a mutt, Bauer's attempt to turn herself into a werewolf, and her numerous encounters with Winsloe--are always presented as aberrations, the result of protocols being ignored or rules being broken, they are not dealt with by compound authorities as harm done to a person, but rather damage done to an asset. All of this brings to mind a prison. However, the race-based imprisonment, the scientific experiments, the choice of some prisoners to become collaborators, and the high-flown rhetoric about the good of humanity, evokes Nazi concentration camps. The compound is constructed and operated in such a way that humans can brutalize and demoralize supernaturals without taking full responsibility for it, while assuring themselves that they are being kind to their prisoners, and acting for the greater good.

Winsloe is the exception to this. There is no sense that he cares at all for the good of humanity. Indeed, he periodically frustrates his colleagues by taking one of the supernaturals out and hunting him or her to the death. Elena muses, "He was young and

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid. 184, 198.

rich and powerful. Delayed gratification wasn't in his vocabulary."⁶⁸⁷ Armstrong implies that Winsloe's bad behaviour either stems from or manifests in an overfondness for gaming, first having him complain to Elena:

Not much of a hunt. Especially the witch. You'd think she'd have been more of a challenge, casting spells and all that. In RPGs the magical races can be your strongest players once they gain enough experience. But in real life? She fell apart. Couldn't take it. Cast a few penny-ante spells and quit. Found her curled up under a bush. No survival instinct.⁶⁸⁸

Later, he has the following exchange with Elena:

He rolled his eyes in near lust. 'The weapons. Unbelievable what they come up with these days. I have lockers of them scattered all over the playing field, so I'll have variety. Only thing missing is a nail gun. [...] The nail gun's always been my favorite.'

'You hunt with a nail gun?'

'Not out here. In games, of course. The nail gun is the absolute best. The shredding factor can top grenades.'

'Games,' I repeated. 'You mean video games?'

'What other kind is there?'

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid. 217.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid. 211.

I looked out at the forest beyond. The playing field, he'd called it. A giant, custom-designed playing field stocked with high-tech gadgets, booby traps, and an arsenal of weapons.

'That's what this is,' I said slowly. 'A video game. A real-life video game.'

'One step up from virtual reality. Actual reality. What a concept.' He grinned and slapped me on the rear again. 'Let's move. The game is afoot.'⁶⁸⁹

Winsloe is so fond of the hunt that when a guard shoots at his quarry in self-defense, he shoots and kills the guard.⁶⁹⁰ He cares nothing even for Bauer, his own team member, when she is on the verge of death.⁶⁹¹ As a supernatural and a woman, Elena is prey to him in every possible sense, and she rapidly realizes that his goal is to make sure she knows that.⁶⁹² But his behaviour with humans suggests that he holds them in equal contempt; that he is an opportunist who will leap at whatever promises gratification of his twin desires for money and power.

The billionaire is, as we have seen, not a new villain in urban fantasy. Neither is the too-powerful child with no sense of control or proportion. In Tyrone Winsloe, Armstrong combines the two into a character who creates a monstrous institution, even as his actions work to undermine it.

Rich humans thirsty for supernatural power are also the villains of Armstrong's *No Humans Involved*. A group of affluent professionals in Hollywood are torturing and

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid. 213. One wonders to what degree the speech about the dehumanizing effects of technology is motivated by Tyrone Winsloe.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid. 226.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid. 208.

⁶⁹² Ibid. 207.

murdering children to gain magical powers. Magical evidence shows that the killers feel guilty about their actions⁶⁹³, but they persist anyway, because they have heard of a tradition of gaining power through child sacrifice, and because it works.

May Donovan, their leader, is also the leader of a skeptics' society. Vegas says of her, "She seeks out knowledge, but gets nowhere. So she flips sides--works out her frustration by uncovering scams while still secretly searching those scams for truth."⁶⁹⁴ As with Eve Levine, who goes from a practitioner of black magic to an angel, one apparent stance is capable of becoming its polar opposite.

Human frustration with the idea that supernatural powers are out there and simply denied to them is understandable. But Matasumi, Bauer, and Donovan are willing to knowingly do harm in order to gain that power. In most of Armstrong's books, humans are part of the setting, people who cannot know about supernaturals and--however obnoxious and stuffy they become--must be protected at all costs. But just as it is a mistake to say any one of Armstrong's magical races is completely evil, humans are most assuredly not all good.

Personal Demon involves the most nuanced and sensitive portrayal of evil. There is nothing here that could be called elemental evil. The two Haig brothers have lived in fear of Cabals their entire lives. One of them defends the murder of their fellow gang members by telling half-demon Hope Adams:

Hell, I liked them. [...] But there wasn't any other way, Hope. You'll see that soon.

You can't worry about other people. They'd do the same to you. You can't let

⁶⁹³ Armstrong, *No Humans Involved* 249.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid. 283.

anything block you from your goal. [...] Sonny and I, we've been given a gift. To not use that gift would be wrong. You have one too--something that makes you better than any Cabal sorcerer. So why should you work for them? Grovel to them? Why should they hold all the power? Biology is destiny, Hope. It's time for you to seize your destiny.⁶⁹⁵

This, of course, is what Hope fears most: that biology is destiny, that her half-demon side is a greater influence on her decisions than the relationships she has worked to build with the people she cares about, and that she is fated to take pleasure in the violent deaths of others. These remarks seem designed to make the Haig brothers less sympathetic in the moment, allowing Adams and her friends to kill one and imprison the other without much compunction.

But Armstrong is careful to show that the root of the brothers' behaviour is not just a different set of willfully held beliefs about their own nature and the value of other people; these beliefs are themselves the product of grave injustice. The brothers are the inbred descendants of a shapeshifter who was captured and killed by Matasumi, Bauer, and Winsloe. Their mother, afraid that they would be a target for the Cabals, kept moving her sons from place to place, and was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia by the human community. Lucas Cortez acknowledges:

There was no indication the Cabals new anything about Crystal or her sons.

But if they had, her fears would have been well grounded. The Cabals fought bitterly

⁶⁹⁵ Armstrong, *Personal Demon* 337.

for custody of rare supernaturals. For a new mutation like this? They'd have destroy everything--and everyone--in their path to get these boys. The fact that they *hadn't* only proved they'd known nothing about them.

What stories had Crystal told her boys? What hatred of the Cabals had she instilled in them? It didn't matter. Whatever environmental factors had gone into creating Jasper and Jason Haig, they weren't children anymore. They were brilliant and ruthless killers, able to take on the form of anyone. A threat unlike any we'd ever seen.⁶⁹⁶

The surviving Haig brother is kept prisoner by the Cortez Cabal, fulfilling his and his family's worst fears.

In Armstrong's work, evil itself is not tempting; the temptation is to surrender control of one's supernatural impulses, or to abdicate responsibility, in ways that may result in harm. Networks of friends are protection against this temptation, and also help to clarify characters' moral reasoning. Evil is generally not polluting, palpable, or disembodied. It is often callous, but "competitive" is not quite the right word: individual villains pursuing their own agendas act from a sense of entitlement, so that they are not so much competing for resources as laying claim to them without any regard for the consequences. It is in this sense, too, that evil in Armstrong's work is dehumanizing.

Evil in these books, as in many others in this subgenre, is framed as crime. Often rooted in psychopathy, it is the property of single aberrant individuals. Those guilty of it are punished, imprisoned, occasionally executed. But this is a universe where the

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid. 341.

structures of power are not perfect, are not even always just. Although the books rarely call power structures themselves evil, and when they do, this criticism is never allowed to stand unchallenged, they do ask readers to consider the degree to which these structures engender, enable, and reward the very evil that they claim to defend against.

Conclusions

Recurring themes among Armstrong's protagonists include a struggle to practice ethical behaviour in circumstances where such behaviour is not externally rewarded; the need to strike a balance between biology, culture, and one's own moral code, with the recognition that that balance can shift depending on the circumstances; the cultivation of empathy as a grounding mechanism; and a need for community. Rather than being lone fighters drifting from circle to circle, or magically ordained protectors of all that is right and good, Armstrong's protagonists draw their strength from supportive relationships with other supernaturals. They are not transgressors simply because of their biology, or because they are a law unto themselves; they are transgressors because it is a principled position in the face of power structures that are not always just.

Despite the predominance of parahumans in Armstrong's work, everything happens on a very human scale. There are gestures in the directions of essential evil and a presumably beneficent creator, but even these manifest as serial killers and bureaucrats respectively, as if in constructing her universe, Armstrong has largely done away with the possibility of otherness, a circumstance that carries with it its own pitfalls.

Good and evil are not simple choices in Armstrong's universe, but call for complex moral reasoning. The books also acknowledge that two characters can make two different choices in similar circumstances, and still be considered to be acting morally. These choices become more difficult, however, when a character faces an institution backed by tradition, resources, and many voices, be it a supernatural organization, a body of authority in the afterlife, or just a conservative small town.

In Armstrong's books, the best mechanism for mediating between the demands of the individual and the demands of the greater community, including outside systems, is the diverse circle of friends around which the series pivots. Characters view the world through the lens of their own moral code, but their friends can reframe moral choices in ways that allow them to keep those codes intact while negotiating the demands of their own groups, the human world, and their own needs and desires. One of the ways of identifying characters who do evil is by their dismissive attitudes towards these ties.

In the supernatural romance subgenre, evil gives female protagonists a chance to demonstrate physical and magical prowess, often to the surprise of unsympathetic male characters. Armstrong's work is unusual in the extent to which the author goes to make clear that evil is a function of cultural context and personal choices, rather than biological and social determinism.

As I have mentioned, another feature of the supernatural romance subgenre is that evil is framed as crime. The supernatural romance genre is overwhelmingly aimed at women, who are often socialized to fear criminals, so evil criminals present a credible threat that can be taken down in (wish-fulfilling) physical combat by a strong female protagonist. Moreover, criminals are easier to cultivate than a Tolkienesque Dark Lord,

especially in an urban environment, creating the possibility for a series--a case of marketing strategies influencing content.

Conflating crime and evil can reinforce existing power structures, placing them in the role of the hero to criminal evil's dragon, and many of the examples of this subgenre that I reviewed were rather conservative in nature. However, Armstrong balances her depiction of evil as crime with an acknowledgement that crime happens for complex reasons, one of which is systemic injustice, thereby critiquing those same power structures.

Chapter 8: “I don’t know what the right thing to do was--I suspect there wasn’t a right thing in that circumstance”: China Miéville

British author China Miéville sets his fiction in self-contained cities, where hybridity, multiplicity, and ambiguity are not simply good things to become comfortable with in order to more fully partake in the world, but basic facts of life that characters must accept in order to navigate reality. Although Miéville cautions against reading his fiction as any sort of political manifesto, he does write from a social justice perspective. Respecting the personhood of others, acknowledging one’s own privilege, and asking questions of the accepted order are basic tools for functioning in the world.

Miéville’s fantasies sometimes playfully engage with the idea of essential and elemental evil, but only in his children’s fantasy, *Un Lun Dun*, is it the real threat. Generally, it is not appropriate to talk about evil in his work. Where Kelley Armstrong is ambivalent towards systems, Miéville stops just short of antipathy towards them: systemic oppression and state collusion with commercial interests are major sources of harm in his fiction. His characters are critical of systems, but an essential part of their development is realizing how they benefit from these systems.

Context and Reception

Miéville has been hailed by Sherryl Vint as “leading revolutions in fantasy as both a writer and a critic” and as

the author most associated with the 'New Weird,' a term which has recently been used to describe a mode of fantastic literature that exceeds the tired tropes and themes often associated with genre fantasy and endless sequels, and instead reinvigorates fantastic writing as a blend of science fiction, Surrealism, fantasy, magical realism, and Lovecraftian horror that is attentive to both its pulp and its high culture influences and roots.⁶⁹⁷

Vint adds that Miéville "is blazing the trail for a new model of fantasy literature that eschews the consolatory mode perfected by Tolkien [...] that rediscovers the fantastic's capacity to make the familiar strange and to provoke us to see how the world might be otherwise."⁶⁹⁸

Miéville wrote his first two books while working towards his doctorate in International Law at the London School of Economics. A self-described classical Marxist, he has published a body of scholarly non-fiction written from a Marxist perspective. Of his fiction, however, he is quick to note, "Just because you are a leftist writer doesn't mean that you have to be into propaganda. I would never try to convince someone of socialism through my novels. It would probably make a very bad novel, and a very bad case of socialism."⁶⁹⁹ Elsewhere, however, he admits, "I wrote [*Perdido Street Station*] because I love writing books about weird sh** and monsters, but I fill it with the concerns and

⁶⁹⁷ Sherryl Vint, "Introduction: Special Issue on China Miéville," *Extrapolation* 50:2 (2009): 197.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid. 197.

⁶⁹⁹ China Miéville, interview with Cheryl Morgan, *Strange Horizons*, 1 October 2001, 14 June 2011 <<http://strangehorizons.com/2001/20011001/china.shtml>>.

fascinations that are in my head, and it's no surprise that Marxism features large in there."⁷⁰⁰

There has been a wealth of scholarly material written on Miéville's fiction, and entire journal issues have been dedicated to analyses of his work. Much of this, however, engages with his novels from a Marxist perspective, in a depth that is of limited use to the current study.

Marxist theorists such as Darko Suvin, Carl Freedman, and Fredric Jameson have argued that science fiction, with its emphasis on rationality, progress, and the potential to change the world for the better, is better suited to Marxism than is fantasy. Sandy Rankin writes, "In Suvin's view, fantasy represents an alternative to the present, but because it is anti-rationalist, privileging an idealized past, privileging the existence of never-possible monsters and never-possible magic, fantasy may estrange readers from uncompromising realism, but in a manner that is inimical to cognition."⁷⁰¹ A *Gothic Studies* interview with Miéville asks him about the leftist point of view that works of fantasy are "complicit with the dominant order, not because they generate emotional intensity, but that they do so as a means of channeling this affect away from social critique."⁷⁰² Miéville replies that such critiques are not grounded in a sound theory of fantasy; that just because mainstream commercial fantasy tends to operate along these lines does not mean that this is intrinsic to the genre.⁷⁰³

⁷⁰⁰ China Miéville, interview with Joan Gordon, "Reveling in Genre: An Interview with China Miéville," *Science Fiction Studies* 30:3 (2003): 363.

⁷⁰¹ Sandy Rankin, "China Miéville and the Misbegot: Monsters, Magic, and Marxism," diss., U of Arkansas, 2009, 28.

⁷⁰² China Miéville, interview, "Gothic Politics: A Discussion with China Miéville," *Gothic Studies* 10:1 (2008), 61.

⁷⁰³ Ibid. 63.

While Rankin uses Marxist theories to carve out a space for fantasy, and William J. Burling argues that Miéville's work represents a new genre altogether, Radical Fantasy⁷⁰⁴ (largely by contrasting it with sweeping and contentious generalizations about fantasy), Miéville himself responds to criticism of this nature in four ways. First of all, he argues that the line between science fiction and fantasy is blurred:

We imagine the impossible. Now, within that you have to distinguish the 'never-possible' and the 'might-be-possible sometime.' Crudely, this looks like the distinction between fantasy and science fiction, but I maintain that there's no such hard distinction and that the differences between the 'never-' and the 'not-yet-possible' are *less important* than their shared 'impossibleness.'⁷⁰⁵

The two genres arose at the same time, post-Enlightenment,⁷⁰⁶ and are intertwined.

Moreover, he points out that much of science fiction uses only the pretense of rationalism; that the scientific "expert" is often employed in a way that "evacuates science substantively of its actual rational content so that it becomes predicated on charisma and authority."⁷⁰⁷

Thirdly, he says that the Marxist arguments against fantasy apply only to a certain *kind* of fantasy:

⁷⁰⁴ William J. Burling, "Periodizing the Postmodern: China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* and the Dynamics of Radical Fantasy," *Extrapolation* 50:2 (2009): 327.

⁷⁰⁵ Miéville, "Reveling in Genre" 367.

⁷⁰⁶ Miéville, "Gothic Politics," 62.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid. 63.

Crudely, I think [Fredric] Jameson has taken the overwhelming tsunami of post-Tolkien fantasy--what's sometimes called EFP: Extruded Fantasy Product--and taken it as definitional to the form, which is a wrong-headed thing to do. [...] [H]is case about magic is only true if based on a model of post-Tolkienian fantasy whereby the magic is essentially a reflection of a nostalgic, post-rural enclave. If we define fantasy on other models, then there is absolutely nothing intrinsically antipathetic to a relationship between magic and utopianism. [...] The problem is that the post-Tolkienian model of fantasy has become so dominant that critics try to retroactively construct theories of genre from *The Lord of the Rings*, which is like trying to theorize romantic fiction by looking at Mills and Boon rather than *Jane Eyre*.⁷⁰⁸

Finally, he argues, in an editorial introduction to an issue of the Marxist journal *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory*, "we need fantasy to think the world, and to change it."⁷⁰⁹ Sandy Rankin expands on this, saying, "Fantasy can subvert ossified norms not only in regards to generic conventions and generic borders, but also in regards to conceptions of reality, conceptions of our world, and conceptions of what our world can become."⁷¹⁰

Although Tolkien's own critical works emphasized the value of making the familiar strange and suggesting how the world could be otherwise, it has become fashionable to frame Miéville's work as the antidote to Tolkien's--a view that Miéville himself heartily

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid. 63-64.

⁷⁰⁹ China Miéville, "Editorial Introduction," *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory* 10:4, ed. China Miéville (2002): 48, qtd. in Rankin, *China Miéville and the Misbegot: Monsters, Magic, and Marxism*, 26.

⁷¹⁰ Rankin, *China Miéville and the Misbegot*, 25.

endorses, saying to an interviewer, "I kind of make a checklist: Tolkien is rural and bucolic, so let's make it urban and sh***y; Tolkien is feudalism lite, so let's make it capitalism dark, and you go on like that."⁷¹¹ Miéville's work is critical of, and acts as a corrective to, some of the underlying assumptions of the Lord of the Rings books and the ways in which these have been incorporated wholesale into the fantasy tradition. The sharply defined and ideologically freighted binaries of good and evil, the country and the city, the agrarian and the industrial, the ancient and the modern, are all resisted and complicated in Miéville's books. Miéville challenges fantasy traditions concerning racial essentialism, the legitimacy of power, the rootedness of fantasy in established bodies of myth, and personhood.

However, what Miéville and Tolkien are doing is not all that different. Each has reacted to what he sees as a set of problematic assumptions, and used fantasy to explode those assumptions, telling stories that highlight certain problems and propose alternatives.

Miéville's fantasies have a different relationship with mythic material. Many of the myths he draws on are modern and technological: Judah Low and the golem, and the expansionist narrative that accompanied the building of North American railways, in *Iron Council*; the voyage of Darwin's *Beagle* in *Kraken*; flight, the perpetual motion machine, and the weapon that renders the land unlivable and produces monsters in *Perdido Street Station*; nationalism in *The City and the City*.

Miéville's other tack, when working with mythic material, is to playfully address inconsistencies, faulty assumptions, and failures of imagination in more traditional fantasy material. Thus, in *Kraken* magicians' familiars go on strike while Cthulhu cultists amiably

⁷¹¹ China Miéville, interview with Charles N. Brown, "Messing with Fantasy: Interview with China Miéville," *Locus* 48:3 (2002), 5, qtd. in Joan Gordon, "Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville's 'Perdido Street Station,'" *Science Fiction Studies* 30:3 (2003), 462.

share a church building with Baptists; and in *Un Lun Dun* the tall, blond Chosen One fails in her quest, and her task is taken up by the girl the prophecies have designated her funny sidekick.

The worlds that Miéville writes about--whether variations of our own, or Bas-Lag, his own creation--have no room for purity, and the impulse to achieve or preserve purity is a dangerous one. Thus cities, with all their ambiguity, hybridity, and multiplicity, are ideal settings for Miéville's books.

Construction of Bas-Lag, and the Role of Cities

Miéville's Bas-Lag is a rich, complex, and meticulously realized world. In many ways, it defies fantasy conventions; in others, it takes fantasy conventions to their logical conclusions, in ways that open up new spaces for imagination.

The Bas-Lag novels are oriented around, if not set in, the city of New Crobuzon, a huge metropolis that appears to be a city-state, but it is also clear that the city is set in a larger world, one organized along different lines from the Earth. The world has its own rich history, but that history, and narratives thereof, do not inform the actions of the Bas-Lag novels as they tend to in high fantasy. Bas-Lag's relationship to Earth is never revealed, although many plant and animal species are the same, and in *Un Lun Dun*, when Deeba, from this world, uses a library to cross between the worlds, some of the books she sees during her passage are New Crobuzonian children's classics.

Bas-Lag's different regions are home to various nonhuman sentient peoples, or xenians: the garuda, an avian species; the vodyanoi, an amphibious species; the hotchi, who

are said to resemble hedgehogs; flying wyrmen; the blood-drinking anophelii; the marsh-dwelling stiltspear; the cactacae, who, as their name suggests, are giant, sentient, mobile cacti; vampyrs; and the khepri, the females of which have red humanoid bodies and beetles for heads. This is not an exhaustive list, but merely those who recur the most frequently.

Magic--called thaumaturgy--coexists with steampunk versions of high technology in Bas-Lag. Robots and computers--constructs and analytical engines--form a secret sentient hive mind in the centre of New Crobuzon in *Perdido Street Station* (but are all slaughtered prior to the events in *Iron Council*). At the same time, the world is marred by a region formerly known as Suroch, where two hundred years earlier, the Pirate Wars used magical weapons that use wild magic, or Torque, and wrought destruction similar to that associated with nuclear war⁷¹²; and by a natural Torque-storm known as the Cacotopic Stain.⁷¹³ Magic and technology are not separate poles or competing forces: machines incorporate thaumaturgy, and rockmilk, the substance that fuels magic, is pumped from the ground alongside oil. In this universe, then, magic, like technology, is morally neutral.

At the economic and cultural centre of Bas-Lag is the city-state of New Crobuzon. Most of Bas-Lag's various species of people are represented there, but humans are the most numerous and powerful species in the city, pushing the xenians to the margins of society. The xenians tend to be concentrated in various ghettos, although some neighbourhoods are more diverse than others. One of the highlights of Miéville's work is his loving, but utterly unromanticized, descriptions of the urban environment. This is how New Crobuzon is introduced in the opening pages of *Perdido Street Station*:

⁷¹² China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* (New York: Random House, 2003), 198.

⁷¹³ Ibid. 200.

The river twists and turns to face the city. It looms suddenly, massive, stamped on the landscape. Its light wells up around the surrounds, the rock hills, like bruise-blood. Its dirty towers glow. I am debased. I am compelled to worship this extraordinary presence that has silted into existence at the conjunction of two rivers. It is a vast pollutant, a stench, a klaxon sounding. Fat chimneys retch dirt into the sky even now in the deep night. It is not the current which pulls us but the city itself, its weight sucks us in. Faint shouts, here and there the calls of beasts, the obscene clash and pounding from the factories as huge machines run. Railways trace urban anatomy like protruding veins. Red brick and dark walls, squat churches like troglodytic things, ragged awnings flickering, cobbled mazes in the old town, culs-de-sac, sewers riddling the earth like secular sepulchres, a new landscape of wasteground, crushed stone, libraries fat with forgotten volumes, old hospitals, towerblocks, ships and metal claws that lift cargoes from the water.

How could we not see this approaching? What trick of topography is this, that lets the sprawling monster hide behind corners to leap out at the traveller?

It is too late to flee.⁷¹⁴

The city is described sublimely, affectionately, but nevertheless in terms of filth and contamination. And lest one think that Miéville really does not like cities, descriptions of the countryside, when they come, are not more favourable--the land is either bleak and lifeless, or lushly corrupt. There is no room for purity anywhere in this landscape, urban or rural, and no chance to ignore the ugliness of industry and pollution: to appreciate New

⁷¹⁴ Ibid. 1-2.

Crobuzon is to appreciate it as a damaged, crowded, filthy, teeming, vibrant, diverse, postmodern whole.

Joan Gordon writes of New Crobuzon:

The city itself is a hybrid, built among the bones of some vast long-dead creature, a collection of neighborhoods distinguished by strange architectures, full of immigrants, a bit like a very far-future London, but not quite: a hyperbolic metaphor for the hybrid nature of the great cities of the contemporary world. The city, though it is a constructed and unique hybrid like the Remades, is, nevertheless, a thriving, constantly adaptive example of hybrid vigor, an even broader interpretation of the cultural hybrid metaphor.⁷¹⁵

In such a setting, it is hard to even imagine characters, actions, or stances that are wholly good or wholly bad. Even though in the otherworldly Bas-Lag Miéville does not have the challenge that the other authors in this study have, of representing the city in ways that conform to what the reader knows of cities, New Crobuzon is constructed in such a way that hybridity, multiplicity, and ambiguity are not only preserved, but absolutely necessary.

The Bas-Lag books are what Farah Mendlesohn calls Immersive fantasy: there is no mundane world as a point of comparison⁷¹⁶--or rather, the mundane world of the Bas-Lag novels is one in which magic exists. The city here is not a place that needs to be reclaimed

⁷¹⁵ Gordon, "Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville's 'Perdido Street Station'" 460.

⁷¹⁶ Mendlesohn, 59.

for magic; nor is it merely a backdrop for action. New Crobuzon is the centre of the world, and magic is woven into its very fibre.

At the bottom of the social hierarchy are the Remade, who as a group function as an indictment of Western prison systems. These are people who have been sent to punishment factories where their bodies are modified, sometimes for industrial applications and sometimes just to humiliate or debilitate them. The modification cannot be undone, and those who undergo it are often unemployable afterward, forcing them into lives of poverty. Derkhan, an activist, tells Isaac dan der Grimnebulin, the protagonist of *Perdido Street Station*, "There's so much contempt, prejudice against them. [...] And it's not like people don't know they've got [...] horrendous lives, for the most part...it's that there's a lot of people who kind of vaguely think they deserve it, even if they pity them, or think it's Gods-given, or rubbish like that."⁷¹⁷ The Remade are often used for slave labour. On the fringes of the city, however--both geographically and socially--are the fReemade, bands of Remade men and women who have rejected the system that oppresses them, and escaped, often surviving outside the city as bandits.

At the top, the mayor of the city--Bentham Rudgutter in *Perdido Street Station* and *The Scar*; Eliza Stem-Fulcher in *Iron Council*--is backed by a powerful and brutal militia whose primary purpose is to protect the interests of the powerful rather than actually serve the cause of justice. They have many undercover agents, and reward people for informing on their friends and neighbours. While New Crobuzon is the bright heart of the world, its power structures are monstrous: the system that keeps people fearful of and

⁷¹⁷ Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* 81.

grateful for the militia also provides a steady stream of offenders, who can then be Remade and enslaved in order to improve the city's fortunes.

Although New Crobuzon is the largest city, there are other entities with alternative power structures. *The Scar* is set largely on Armada, a floating city built on thousands of lashed-together ships. Rather than being led by any central authority, the city is divided into ridings, which have different styles of governance. Citywide decisions are made by a council of representatives of each riding. Founded by pirates, the city adds to its substance and its population by capturing ships. Those aboard--the "press-ganged"--are given lodging and jobs in the new city, but are never allowed to leave. The protagonist, Bellis Coldwine, resents being press-ganged. However, her associate Silas Fennec observes that while there are richer and poorer people in Armada, there is no one living in abject poverty as people do in New Crobuzon.⁷¹⁸ Moreover, the Remade slaves Bellis was travelling with are considered free and equal citizens here.⁷¹⁹

Another community of note in Bas-Lag is Iron Council, a mobile democratic collective founded when the workers building the New Crobuzon railroad staged a revolt, taking the train and the tracks for themselves. The rails are pulled up behind the train and laid down in front of it, keeping the Iron Council on the move, albeit at a glacial pace.⁷²⁰ It needs to be mobile; the New Crobuzon militia has never stopped looking for it.

Armada and Iron Council serve two functions. They are both examples of other ways of living, of being in the world. The suggestion is that they are both in some ways preferable to New Crobuzon, with their lack of poverty and their granting of full citizenship

⁷¹⁸ China Miéville, *The Scar* (New York: Random House, 2002), 240.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid. 74

⁷²⁰ China Miéville, *Iron Council* (London: Pan Books, 2005), 219-220.

to the Remade. Neither has anything approaching New Crobuzon's militia, and the defensive forces they do have are not organized against their own populaces (although, after the grindylow attack Armada, "Garwater loyalists"⁷²¹ patrol the streets to put down a rebellion). Secondly, both Armada and Iron Council are mobile cities targeted by the New Crobuzon militia. New Crobuzon's centrality gives its authorities a degree of expansionist hubris, and its behaviour with the smaller cities illustrates its relationship with the rest of Bas-Lag. But even after Bellis Coldwine sees the very worst of New Crobuzon, she wishes to return; it is still the centre of everything.

It should be plain, by this point, that Miéville is extremely concerned with power structures, and the ways in which power is exercised and maintained. In the Bas-Lag novels, New Crobuzonian hegemony is a major source of antagonism and harm. Because Bas-Lag is not constructed according to traditional high fantasy blueprints, Miéville is freer to experiment and explore. High Cromlech, the City of the Dead; Gnurr Kett, home of the Mosquito-People, and Salkrikaltor under the sea are intriguing place-names with which to season a fantasy story; Miéville takes it further, however, and imagines credible and complex histories, cultures, and characters for these places. Miéville says that he begins with "an image, as unreal and affecting as possible,"⁷²² and then works backward, creating the circumstances and context that make it plausible, rich, and grounded.

Bas-Lag's great complexity and richness is reflected in its moral complexity. There are protagonists and antagonists, there are good ideas and bad ideas, and power is used with more and less regard for the people it affects, but there is very little that could be

⁷²¹ China Miéville, *The Scar*, 526.

⁷²² Miéville, "Reveling in Genre" 357.

called evil. Characters often find themselves on the wrong side of the law, or acting in good faith to bad ends. Nothing is simple in Bas-Lag, nothing is easy, and nothing is clear.

Construction of the World of *The City and the City*, and the Role of the City

In *The City and the City*, the twin city-states of Beszel and Ul Qoma are made to seem part of the reader's world. There is no magic there, and the only innovation is the unique border between the two cities: they occupy the same geographical space, with some neighbourhoods in one and some in the other, and some neighbourhoods belonging to both in what the book calls "crosshatch." The boundaries between the two cities are intangible, but nonetheless rigorously policed national borders.

Citizens of each nation learn from childhood to ignore--to "unsee"--the parts of their world that belong to the other nation. To see across the border, to allow oneself to interact with anything on the other side of that border, is a crime called breach. To breach openly is a more serious crime than murder, and those who do disappear forever. To this end, the two nations ban books that question the boundaries, and even certain colours are illegal in the cities. Why is breach more serious than any other crime? The answer is implicit in the text: such bizarre national boundaries require constant shoring up. Allowing even the thought of transgression--even the simple question of whether or not the borders are *right*--would send the whole construct tumbling down.

This results in situations that are outlandish, but that make perfect sense according to the novel's logic. A person in Beszel cannot visit the Ul Qoman house next door without first going miles away to the official border crossing. When connected buildings in

different cities catch fire, both fire departments fight the blaze. Detective Tyador Borlú gets a tip from an Ul Qoman (making an international call), but cannot act on it because the poster asking for tips was posted in Beszel, and for an Ul Qoman to notice it is technically a crime.⁷²³ And when Mahalia Geary's killer is identified, he flees the police on both sides of the border by walking in crosshatched areas in such a way that no one can pinpoint his nationality, and therefore no one can arrest him.⁷²⁴

There are also rumours of a city between the two cities--Orciny, which is said to exercise control over both cities. When he entertains the possibility that it exists, Borlú posits that it is "[s]omething so small, so powerful, lodged in the crevices of another organism. Willing to kill. A parasite. A tick-city, quite ruthless."⁷²⁵ Orciny is folklore, but its niche, so to speak, is occupied by Breach, the power that maintains the integrity of the borders. Breach answers to no one, and is spoken of with reverence that borders on the religious: its agents are called avatars. In the bifurcated world of Beszel and Ul Qoma, they have the power to do things other citizens do not: to cross the street, to notice buildings, to look at all of the people around them. When Borlú, held by Breach and assisting them with their investigations, is able to buy food at a Besz stand and drink at an Ul Qoman supermarket, when he takes the Ul Qoman subway and then the Besz tram,⁷²⁶ the reader can share his wonder, even though they presumably enjoy the freedom to carry out the same actions in their own community.

Internationally, the two cities are looked upon as an oddity, and the events of the novel's climax hinge on a foreign businessman's lack of fear of Breach. But Ul Qoma,

⁷²³ China Miéville, *The City and the City* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009), 36-37.

⁷²⁴ Ibid. 292.

⁷²⁵ Ibid. 217.

⁷²⁶ Ibid. 253-254.

subject of a U.S. embargo, is making itself more attractive to corporations, and it also contains more sites of archaeological importance than does Beszel, so the international community plays along. In this environment, maintaining the border takes precedence over all other activities, a case of political and economic priorities trumping both logic and ethics, as under this scheme the greatest crime one can commit is one that is utterly harmless.

Construction of the World(s) of *Un Lun Dun*, and the Role of the City

As with *The City and the City*, the world of *Un Lun Dun* is--with a quick gesture made at other cosmopolitan cities--the city. But where in *The City & The City*, the two cities share the same space, *Un Lun Dun* is set entirely in two different versions of the same city. London is, apparently, the reader's London. UnLondon is what Miéville calls an abcity, constructed of what London has thrown away, and populated by a rich variety of people:

Most people looked human (if in an unusual range of colors), but a sizeable proportion did not. Deeba and Zanna saw bubble-eyes, and gills, and several different kinds of tails. The two girls stared when a bramble-bush walked past, squeezed into a suit, a tangle of blackberries, thorns, and leaves bursting out of its collar.

There were no cars, but there were plenty of other vehicles. Some were carts tugged by unlikely animals, and many were pedal-powered. Not bicycles, though: the travelers perched on jerkily walking stilts, or at the front of long carriages like

tin centipedes. One goggled rider traveled by in a machine like a herd of nine wheels.

‘Out of the way!’ the driver yelled. ‘Noncycle coming through!’

They passed curbside cafés, and open-fronted rooms full of old and odd-looking equipment.

‘There’s loads of empty houses,’ said Zanna.

‘A few,’ Obaday said. ‘Most aren’t empty, though: they’re *emptish*. Open access. For travelers, tribes, and mendicants. Temporary inhabitants. Now we’re in Varmin Way. This is Turpentine Road. This is Shatterjack Lane.’ They were going too fast for Zanna and Deebea to do more than gain a few impressions.

The streets were mostly red brick, like London terraces, but considerably more ramshackle, spindly and convoluted. Houses leaned into each other, and stories piled up at complicated angles. Slate roofs lurched in all directions.

Here and there where a house should be there was something else instead.

There was a fat, low tree, with open-fronted bedrooms, bathrooms, and kitchens perched in its branches. People were clearly visible in each chamber, brushing their teeth or kicking back their covers. Obaday took them past a house-sized fist, carved out of stone, with windows in its knuckles; and then the shell of a huge turtle, with a door in the neck hole, and a chimney poking out of its mottled top.

Zanna and Deebea stopped to stare at a building with oddly bulging walls, in a patchwork of black, white, and gray bricks of varying sizes.

‘Oh gosh,’ said Deebea. ‘It’s *junk*.’

The entire three-floor building was mortared-together rubbish. There were fridges, a dishwasher or two, and hundreds of record players, old-fashioned cameras, telephones, and typewriters, with thick cement between them.

There were four round windows like a ship's portholes. Someone inside threw one open: they were the fronts of washing machines, embedded in the facade.⁷²⁷

This passage does a few things. First of all, it invokes the exotic. The exotic is normally a problem in fiction, in that it identifies the exoticized as clearly *other*. But over the course of the book, Deeba finds out that the people she meets, for all their differences, have lives as rich and complex as her own, undermining exoticism as an indicator of otherness (an effect that may well carry over into different texts that invoke the exotic unselfconsciously). Secondly, the passage borrows a Miévilian motif from the Bas-Lag universe: that there are many ways of living, and that great numbers of people survive on the things that those with more affluent lifestyles throw away. UnLondon is a vibrant, thriving, deeply interesting city constructed entirely of the discarded. Mortar the Propheser tells Deeba and her friend Zanna, "This is where the most energetic of London's discards come, and in exchange London takes a few of our ideas--clothes, the waterwheel, the undernet."⁷²⁸ It is possible to see UnLondon as a larger and more wondrous version of a marginalized community, one of the countless mundane unLondons around England and the world. London draws on it, discards things into it, and does not acknowledge it.

⁷²⁷ China Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* (New York: Random House, 2007), 47-49.

⁷²⁸ Ibid. 99.

Miéville himself notes that there is a pre-existing subgenre of “underground London” fantasy, citing Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere* as the most prominent example:

Partly because it’s such an old city, and it’s been constructed on top of earlier layers. There are rivers that have been covered up by the city, and tunnels and construction, of which the tube (the subway trains) are a relatively recent but culturally weighty addition. Of course, the idea of things lurking around below the surface is such a potent image that it’s no surprise that it features heavily in literature.⁷²⁹

There are other abcities: Parisn’t, No York, Helsunki, Lost Angeles, Sans Francisco, Hong Gone, and Romeless are named.⁷³⁰ Whether there are abrural environments, and how they are related to abcities, is never covered. But the abcities’ alterity is a fact on a cosmic level: the skies are lit by the donut-shaped UnSun, whose hole is exactly the size of Earth’s sun.

UnLondon is governed in part by the Propheeseers from the Pons Absconditus, a moving bridge on which the Propheeseers all seem to live. The prophecies they read are contained in a sentient book, called Book, that details, among other things, Zanna’s quest, which seems to follow high fantasy tropes quite closely. Although it appears that the prophecies about the Chosen One are wrong, many of the others appear to be correct. Deebea is able to use the Book as a guide, but can also deviate from it when the need arises.

⁷²⁹ Miéville, “Reveling in Genre” 361. He is actually speaking of his first novel, *King Rat*; Miéville has so far contributed three books to the underground London subgenre.

⁷³⁰ Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* 60. One might point out that the names of these cities appear to be geared to English speakers, rather than the languages spoken in those cities, but the puns remain delightful.

The mistake of the Propheseers is their passive acceptance of the Book's word as authoritative, which closes down other possibilities and blinds them to Deeba's virtues as the Unchosen One. Deeba, who engages with the Book critically, finds that it is not only useful, but willing to help. It is possible to read Deeba's adventures with the Book as a commentary on fantasy, and the potential that Miéville sees in it.

Construction of the World of *Kraken*, and the Role of the City

Kraken is set in a version of London that the reader is supposed to know and recognize, but Miéville again invokes the idea of the under-city:

There are many millions of Londoners, and the very great majority know nothing of the other mapland, the city of knacks and heresies. Those people's millions of everydays are no more everyday than those of the magicians. The scale of the visible city dwarfs that of the mostly-unseen, and that unseen is not the only place where there are amazing things.⁷³¹

Although the London of this world is the reader's London, it is also what Miéville calls a psychopolis⁷³², a vast living organism, complete with entrails to be read.⁷³³ As an ancient entity that has arisen organically, London is a different kind of creature from a North American city.

⁷³¹ China Miéville, *Kraken* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010), 191.

⁷³² Ibid. 194.

⁷³³ Ibid. 198.

London has a group of oracles, the Londonmancers, who are rigorously neutral (and, as in *Un Lun Dun*, unwittingly part of the problem). They see themselves as London's immune system:

Not custodians of the city: they called themselves its cells. They recruited young and nurtured hexes, shapings, foresight and the diagnostic trances they called urbopathy. They, they insisted, were just conduits for the flows gathered by the streets. They did not worship London but held it in respectful distrust, channelled its needs, urges and insights.

You *couldn't* trust it. It wasn't one thing, for a start--though it also was--and it didn't have one agenda. A gestalt metropole entity, with regions like Hoxton and Queen's Park cosying up to the worst power, Walthamstow more combatively independent, Holborn vague and sieve-leaky, all of them bickering components of a totality, a London something, seen.⁷³⁴

Note that in this description, even if one accepts London as a single entity, hybridity, multiplicity, and ambiguity are essential parts of its composition.

Although this London is meant to be read as Earth's London, it is curiously sealed off from the rest of the world. Pop culture from the rest of the world makes its way in, and the Londonmancers have counterparts in other major European cities--the Paristurges, the Warsawtarchs, and the Berlinimagi⁷³⁵--but over the course of the novel, the only things that get in or out are the hired guns Goss and Subby. When one of the Londonmancers proposes

⁷³⁴ Ibid. 194-195.

⁷³⁵ Ibid. 194.

fleeing, it is described as heresy.⁷³⁶ Only at the end does anyone seriously consider leaving: Marginalia and Paul, the man on whom the crime boss Tattoo is tattooed, tell the protagonist that they are going to “[m]aybe the country. Maybe another city.”⁷³⁷ But Paul tells Marginalia, “You think this is the only place gods live? [...] There’s no getting away from that now. Wherever you go, that’ll be somewhere a god lives.”⁷³⁸

As with other urban fantasies set in this world, innocuous phenomena that readers might have observed in their own daily lives are here given fantastic explanations rooted in a magical underworld--here metaphorical, where *Un Lun Dun*’s was literal. For example, birds flying in circles are a picket line⁷³⁹, and the flickering of streetlights can be decoded into messages.⁷⁴⁰ Likewise, the recognizable trappings of fantasy, woven into the fabric of mundane London life, are domesticated. Magic, or “knacking,” operates as a London subculture, underground but accessible to those who are aware of it and are interested.

Within the magic subculture, there coexist many more groups and factions: criminal gangs, skilled enthusiasts, cults, and even a branch of the police. There is no single way of engaging with magic, and it can be inborn (as for Kath Collingswood)⁷⁴¹, taught, bought (as with Marginalia’s iPod⁷⁴²), or given (as when Billy’s claim of being the first test tube baby attracts a Benjaminian Angel of Memory, a bottle phylax).⁷⁴³

The mnemophylaxes, who guard the museums, are among the curiouiser creatures that inhabit this London:

⁷³⁶ Ibid. 444.

⁷³⁷ Ibid. 507.

⁷³⁸ Ibid. 507.

⁷³⁹ Ibid. 147.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid. 204-205.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid. 69-71.

⁷⁴² Ibid. 373-374.

⁷⁴³ Ibid. 309-310.

They were not beings, precisely, not from where most Londoners stood, but derived functions that thought themselves beings. In a city where the power of any item derived from its metaphoric potency, all the attention poured into their contents made museums rich pickings for knacking thieves. But the processes that gave them that potential also threw up sentinels.⁷⁴⁴

In a world where belief is this powerful, there is great power in religion--that of both true believers and recreational cult collectors who “trade[...] dissident mysteries in vague competition, as if faiths were Top Trumps cards.”⁷⁴⁵ Something very like H.P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Cult operates here, one of many small religions practicing in London, but it has been practicing for generations, now, and in that time has faded to something comfortable and mildly conservative. They share space with a Baptist church.⁷⁴⁶

These Teuthists worship the giant squid precisely because it does not care about them. Among their writings, protagonist Billy Harrow reads, “Gods are among us and they care nothing and are nothing like us. [...] This is how we are brave: we worship them anyway.”⁷⁴⁷ But the *Architeuthis* is not entirely uncaring: at Billy’s request, it saves the world by catching the time-fire meant to undo evolution in one tentacle, and the villainous Vardy in another, and sacrificing itself so that none of them ever existed.⁷⁴⁸ The universe

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid. 189.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid. 41.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid. 130.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid. 114.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid. 498-499.

may be indifferent in the world of *Kraken*--in all Miéville's worlds--but individuals have agency, and are not confined to the natures prescribed for them.

Protagonists

i) Isaac - *Perdido Street Station*

Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin defies fantasy conventions--those governing both urban and high fantasy--in a number of ways. He is a middle-aged man, unlike the younger protagonists of virtually every book by the previous three authors. He is also fat--not pleasingly plump, but "a dirigible, huge and taut and strong"⁷⁴⁹ in a genre where rotundity is almost always associated with evil, and dark-skinned⁷⁵⁰, albeit in a world where Western culture's dynamics of skin colour are translated rather to species.

Isaac is a scientist who maintains a tenuous relationship with New Crobuzon University⁷⁵¹, and takes commissions from others in order to pay his bills. Although he maintains the image of "the scientist-outcast, the disreputable thinker who walked out of a lucrative teaching post to engage in experiments too outrageous and brilliant for the tiny minds who ran the university",⁷⁵² he left because he was a bad teacher, and maintains his relationship with them so that he has access to their resources.⁷⁵³ He lives in his laboratory, which he shares with two other scientists. Isaac compares his professional self

⁷⁴⁹ Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* 9.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid. 9.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid. 9.

⁷⁵² Ibid. 11.

⁷⁵³ Ibid. 12.

to Perdido Street Station itself, telling Yagharek, the garuda who approaches him for help, “All the trainlines meet there [...]; everything has to pass through it. That’s like me. That’s my job. That’s the kind of scientist I am.”⁷⁵⁴ Joan Gordon adds that like the station, Isaac is “diffuse and permeable, but also central.”⁷⁵⁵ This gives him what Gordon calls “hybrid vigor,” greater creativity and adaptability in the face of new circumstances.

He is in a longterm relationship with a xenian, a khepri woman named Lin, in a time when such relationships are considered outrageous. School politics and Isaac’s reputation are such that while being in the relationship does not hurt his standing at the university, he feels that he must be seen to “[go] through the motions of a cover-up”⁷⁵⁶ to protect his career. He is very careful about how he and Lin are seen in public, to Lin’s understandable distress: she “had begun to hint, with snide and acid remarks, that Isaac’s refusal to declare himself her lover was at best cowardly, at worst bigoted.”⁷⁵⁷ The book offers no pat answers to their competing needs; instead, by the end, the question becomes moot when Lin’s mind is half-eaten by a slake moth, and Isaac is forced to flee New Crobuzon with her, entirely changing the dynamics of their relationship.

The main thread of the plot begins when Yagharek visits Isaac in his laboratory. The garuda, who has come over a thousand miles to find the scientists of New Crobuzon, has had his wings amputated for the only crime the garuda recognize, choice-theft.⁷⁵⁸ He acknowledges his guilt, but wings are part of his personhood⁷⁵⁹, and he yearns to fly again. He has heard that Isaac is the only one who can help him, and pays him up front, in gold.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid. 45.

⁷⁵⁵ Gordon, “Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville’s ‘Perdido Street Station’” 467. Gordon also argues that this hybridity is characteristic of the novel itself.

⁷⁵⁶ Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* 12.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid. 11.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid. 43.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid. 41.

Isaac makes some effort to learn about Yagharek's crime before promising to undo the punishment. But when he asks, Yagharek replies, "This language cannot express my crime. In my tongue... [...] In my tongue they said...they were right...I was guilty of choice-theft...choice-theft in the second degree...with utter disrespect."⁷⁶⁰ Isaac, who has just admitted that he has "no stomach for the law in this city"⁷⁶¹, tells him:

Plenty of my clients are...not entirely on the right side of the law, shall we say? Now, I'm not going to pretend that I even slightly understand what you did, but as far as I'm concerned it's not my business. Like you said, there's no words for your crime in this city: I don't think I could ever understand what it is you've done wrong.⁷⁶²

He is interested in the scientific aspect of Yagharek's problem, and in the end it allows him to make a scientific breakthrough in the form of the crisis engine, a perpetual motion machine.⁷⁶³

Although the principal antagonists, the slake moths, are unleashed on New Crobuzon due to a confluence of circumstances, Isaac is one unwitting link in the chain. As part of his research, he puts it about that he will pay for the capture of winged things. Motivated by this, an acquisitions clerk in the New Crobuzon Parliament⁷⁶⁴ purloins an unusual grub from a shipment of five of them. This becomes a slake-moth, which escapes and liberates its siblings, who wreak havoc on the city. Isaac sets out to destroy the moths,

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid. 43.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid. 43.

⁷⁶² Ibid. 43.

⁷⁶³ Ibid. 147-148.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid. 271.

spurred by a sense of responsibility for the moths' release; by anger at the moths' killing of one of his friends; by a deep conviction in the uselessness of the New Crobuzon militia; by the discovery that his government has tried to cover up their involvement by kidnapping, torturing, and murdering the newspaper editor who broke the story⁷⁶⁵; by the hope that their problems can be solved by his new crisis engine; and by the knowledge that his department head, Vermishank, whom he despises for his involvement with the science of Remaking⁷⁶⁶, was head of the government's slake moth program.⁷⁶⁷ In other words, Isaac's reasons for doing the right thing range from the altruistic to the scientific to the vindictive, with a lot of ground in between.

Isaac is interested in social justice, but occasionally blind to the privilege that being human affords him. When he tries to approach the city's garuda, in hopes of getting one of them to help him understand how they fly, one of them replies, "Might be that the murder squads've found a way to get to us bird-boys. 'Just come along to do research...' Well, none of us is interested, ta."⁷⁶⁸ When Isaac is mystified by this response, Lin signs:

*Because they're xenian and poor and scared, you cretin. [...] Big fat [person] waving money around comes to Spatters, for Jabber's sake, not much of a haven but all they've got, and starts trying to get them to leave it for reasons that he won't explain. Seems to me that Charlie's bang-on right. Place like this needs someone to look after its own. If I was garuda, I'd listen to him, I tell you.*⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid. 283.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid. 149-150.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid. 324.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid. 133.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid. 134-135.

The hero is allowed to be wrong, especially in terms of race relations. (This is something that will be recapitulated later, in *Un Lun Dun*.) Explicit racism is often an indicator of evil in the shared moral shorthand of urban fantasy, but the more subtle ways in which racism is played out in the greater culture are often left uninterrogated. Isaac, as a human being, acts in a way that shows he is unaware of his privilege in an anthropocentric society, and is called on it. He suffers consequences for it, and is remorseful. This is an example of fantasy being used to talk about an issue that it is difficult or impossible to talk about in other arenas. White readers might bristle at the thought of their own actions being interpreted as racist, but it is possible to read of Isaac's actions, see the sense in them, see the sense in Lin's interpretation, and see Isaac's realization and reaction, without being made to feel defensive themselves.

If Isaac is capable of doing harm unthinkingly, his deliberate activities in pursuit of the moths are not always ethical, either. He kidnaps his university department head, Vermishank, whose research has been used in the punishment factories that Remake people, and tortures him to learn more about the moths, responding to Vermishank's protests by saying, "*You're the Remaker.*"⁷⁷⁰ In an unsuccessful moth-killing expedition to the domed cactacae neighbourhood of Shankell, he leaves behind Lemuel Pigeon, the black-market procurer whose services he was engaging. Pigeon has had his spine severed, so he is unable to walk, and going back to rescue him would put the rest of the expedition at risk, but Isaac also owes him a great deal of money, and therefore has a financial incentive to

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid. 324.

leave him. Shortly afterward, Isaac devises a plan to buy a terminally ill man from a hospital, to use as moth bait.

The latter two events are linked. Lemuel is not the only person lost in the expedition, and the entire company spends some time in shock. Isaac, “in a remote misery”⁷⁷¹, recovers first, or at least is the first to channel his grief and guilt into action, as Yagharek narrates:

And the more he talks the more he talks. He talks of plans. His voice hardens. Something has come to an end in him, some waiting, some soft patience that died with Lin and now is buried, and I feel myself become stone as I hear him. He inspires me to rigour and purpose.

He talks of betrayals and counter-betrayals, of mathematics and lies and thaumaturgy, dreams and winged things. [...]

We begin to work, Isaac more fervently than any of us, scribbling frantically.

He looks up after hours of muttered oaths and hissing breakthroughs. We cannot do this, he says. We would need a focus.

And then another hour or two hours pass and he looks up again.

We have to do this, he says, and still, we need a focus.

He tells us what we must do.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid. 498.

*There is silence, and then we debate. Quickly. Anxiously. We raise candidates
and discard them. Our criteria are confused--do we choose the doomed or the loathed?
The decrepit or the vile? Do we judge?
Our morality becomes rushed and furtive.⁷⁷²*

Although it is the group that decides how the person to be sacrificed is chosen, Isaac is the one who puts forward the idea that requires it. This is perhaps largely due to the exigencies of science and thaumaturgy, and the problem that must be solved, but he has also, with the death of Lemuel Pigeon, crossed a line. This may underscore the seriousness of the situation, it may have made Isaac that much more determined to kill the moths as a form of both absolution and revenge, and it may be that having crossed one line, he is more willing to cross another. It may be all three: Isaac's thought process here is opaque, narrated from Yagharek's point of view only.

The sacrifice of the man, Andrej, is a conscious act of wrongdoing, a necessary evil perpetrated by the group. The choosing of the sacrifice falls to Derkhan Bluesday, a worker for *The Runagate Rampant* who is active in leftist politics, a friend of Lin's and of murdered *Runagate Rampant* editor Benjamin Flex's, and when the liberation of the slake moths deprives her of both of them, she throws her lot in with Isaac. A major character, she is plausible and sympathetic, and in this instance she arguably functions as a sort of personification of the group itself. It is she who goes to one of the desperately poor hospitals for desperately poor patients, offering the rest of Yagharek's gold in exchange for one person who fits their parameters:

⁷⁷² Ibid. 498-499.

There had been a ghastly moment of reflection when she had found herself applying a strained and untenable ethics to the choice--*Who here is a militia informer?* she wanted to shout. *Who here has raped? Who has murdered a child? Who has tortured?* She closed down her thoughts. That could not be allowed, she had realized. That might drive her mad. This had to be exigency. This could not be a choice.

[...]

Deep inside her, in the place that still felt, that she could not quite close down, Derkhan had been aware of a plaintive defence, an argument of justification--*See?* she felt herself assert. *We take him but all these others we save!*

But there was no moral accounting that lessened the horror of what she was doing. She could only ignore that anxious discourse. She stared deep and fervent into the nun's eyes. Derkhan closed her hand tight around the nun's fingers.

Help them, she had hissed. This can help them. You can help them all except him or you can help none of them. Help them.

And after a long, long time of silence, of staring at Derkhan with troubled eyes, of looking at the grubby currency and at the gun and then at the dying patients on all sides, the nun put the money into her white overall with a shaking hand. And as she moved away to waken the patient, Derkhan watched her with a terrible, mean triumph.

*See? Derkhan had thought, sick with self-loathing. It wasn't just me! She chose to do it too!*⁷⁷³

This is a kind of moral calculus that does not appear in books by the other authors in this study. In de Lint's and Armstrong's work, characters will, out of necessity, do things that trouble them, but there is atonement and absolution. In Lackey's work, the sacrifice of an innocent person would be a clear indicator of evil, and if a good character were called upon to make such a sacrifice, the victim would be sure to deserve it somehow. For Miéville, however, even though the sacrifice is necessary in order for the moths to be lured in and killed, it is terrible and wrong, and there is no flinching from this conclusion--either by the author, or by any of the characters.

Isaac's guilt does not make him treat Andrej more compassionately. Instead, it makes him crueler:

There was a half-second, a tiny fraction of time, when Isaac opened his mouth, and it seemed that he would say something to assuage the old man's fears, to assure him that he would be unharmed, that he was in safe hands, that there was a reason for his bizarre incarceration. Andrej's shouts faltered for a moment as he stared at Isaac, eager to be reassured.

But Isaac was tired, and he could not think, and the lies that welled up made him feel as if he would vomit. The patter died away silently, and instead Isaac walked across to Andrej and overpowered the decrepit man with ease, stifling his

⁷⁷³ Ibid. 514-516.

nasal wails with strips of cloth. Isaac bound Andrej with coils of ancient rope and propped him as comfortably as possible against a wall.⁷⁷⁴

Later, at one point, he thinks, of Andrej, “*We could take his gag away [...] And he wouldn’t scream...but then he might speak...*”⁷⁷⁵ Andrej is kept bound and gagged not because of anything he would or could do, and not because his captors are bad people, but because they are having difficulty facing what they are doing to him. Joan Gordon sees, in this dynamic, an illustration of the importance that Miéville places on dialectics:

The group of friends forms a transformative place, this example shows, only so long as a conversation continues. For [...] Andrej who never was a part of the conversation, it does not serve that purpose. For one [...] taken against his will, it is more of a totalitarian regime, with all the power, all the communication, going in one direction. Early on I suggested that dialectics, allowing for feedback among members of a group, could keep the totalizing nature of the group from becoming totalitarian. Here, it becomes evident that when the dialectic stops, totalitarianism can begin, highlighting the vital importance of interaction in the novel’s vision.⁷⁷⁶

Andrej serves his purpose, providing the focus for Isaac’s crisis engine and allowing them to kill two of the remaining three moths. In the end, it is a militiaman’s bullet that kills him, before the remaining moth escapes. Whether motivated by Andrej’s impending

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid. 517.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid. 543.

⁷⁷⁶ Gordon, “Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville’s ‘Perdido Street Station’” 473.

death, or freed because the death is someone else's doing rather than his own, or--again-- both, Isaac finally shows the dying man some kindness:

Isaac shouted and rushed to him, held the old man's hand. [...] At the very end, in what might have been a twitch of dying nerves, Andrej tensed and clutched Isaac, hugging him back in what Isaac desperately wanted to be forgiveness.

I had to I'm sorry I'm sorry, he thought giddily.⁷⁷⁷

The book makes no attempt to justify the sacrifice of an unwilling person, even for the greater good. There is no justification and no absolution. Andrej's part in the novel is a study in how benevolent people, in full knowledge of what they are doing, can commit atrocities. Readers can be shocked and horrified; we can call their actions wrong, and Miéville and his characters fully acknowledge that it *is* wrong. However, the text does not leave any space for readers to distance themselves from the characters, to say that these acts make them bad people and under the same circumstances we would never be able to do such a thing. Likewise, it does not allow the reader to shrug and say that this was a necessity and Andrej has died for a good cause.

Although the death of Andrej is a key moment in the delineation of Isaac's character, the capstone to Miéville's moral portrait of his protagonist is Isaac's discovery of the true nature of the crime for which Yagharek lost his wings. When Yagharek's crime is an abstract thing, restoring flight to him is an intriguing intellectual problem. But after the last moth is killed and Yagharek has acquitted himself as a hero, Isaac is visited, alone, by

⁷⁷⁷ Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* 569-570.

Kar'uchai, another garuda. She reveals that although choice-theft is the only crime the garuda recognize, the specific way that Yagharek has manifested it does have a word in Isaac's language: rape.⁷⁷⁸ Kar'uchai herself was his victim, and she asks Isaac to forbear from reversing the punishment:

'Your city institutions... Talking and talking of individuals...but crushing them in layers and hierarchies...until their choices might be between three kinds of squalor.

'We have far less, in the desert. We hunger sometimes, and thirst. *But we have all the choices that we can.* Except when someone forgets themselves, forgets the reality of their companions, as if they were an individual *alone*... And steals food, and takes the choice of others to eat it, or lies about game, and takes the choice of others to hunt it; or grows angry and attacks without reason, and takes the choice of another not to be bruised or to live in fear.

[...]

'I was not *violated* or *ravaged*, Grimneb'lin. I am not *abused* or *defiled*...or *ravished* or *spoiled*. You would call his actions rape, but I do not; that tells me nothing. He *stole my choice*, and that is why he was...judged. It was severe...the last sanction but one... There are many choice-thefts less heinous than his, and only a few more so... And there are others that are judged equal...many of those are actions utterly unlike Yagharek's. Some, you would not deem crimes at all.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid. 608.

'The actions vary: the *crime*...is the theft of *choice*. Your magisters and laws...that sexualize and sacralize...for whom individuals are defined abstract...their matrix-nature ignored...where context is a distraction...cannot grasp that.

'Do not look at me with eyes reserved for victims... And when Yagharek returns...I ask you to observe our justice--Yagharek's justice--not to impute your own. [...]'⁷⁷⁹

Isaac first reacts with anger and defiance, remembering Yagharek's heroism, but Lin, too, has been raped during her time imprisoned by Mr. Motley. Although Kar'uchai has very persuasive reasons for demanding that he consider Yagharek's crime only in the framework laid out for garuda justice, Isaac does not find Kar'uchai's argument itself persuasive unless he thinks about Yagharek's crime in terms of rape, and what was done to the person that *he* loves.⁷⁸⁰ He is torn between loyalty and anger:

He tried to extricate himself.

He tried to think himself away from the whole thing. He told himself desperately that to refuse his services would *not* imply judgement, that it would *not* mean he pretended knowledge of the facts, that it would simply be a way of saying, 'This is beyond me, this is not my business.' But he could not convince himself.

He slumped and breathed a miserable moan of exhaustion. If he turned from Yagharek, he realized, no matter what he said, Isaac would feel himself to have

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid. 608-610.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid. 611.

judged, and to have found Yagharek wanting. And Isaac realized that he could not in conscience imply that, when he did not know the case.

But on the heels of that thought came another; a flipside, a counterpoint.

If withholding help implied negative judgement he could not make, thought Isaac, then helping, bestowing flight, would imply that Yagharek's actions were *acceptable*.

And that, thought Isaac in cold distaste and fury, he *would not do*.⁷⁸¹

He has already spent Yagharek's money--albeit on expenses associated with defeating the slake moths that the garuda's commission inadvertently caused to be released. He, Derkhan, and Lin vacate the safe-house where they are staying, leaving an explanatory note for Yagharek, who reflects, "*I never questioned that I deserved the judgement. [...] I cannot say for sure that I despise him. I cannot say for sure I would do other than he has done.*"⁷⁸²

Miéville writes of this choice, in an e-mail interview with Joan Gordon:

The characters are not necessarily my mouthpieces. I have particularly found that with the ending of the novel, Isaac's dilemma. I've read various criticisms of Isaac's choice as if it were my idea of what was right. I was trying to construct a genuine moral dilemma, to which there was not really a right answer. If you read the ending, you realize that though Isaac ostensibly did what Kar'uchai, Yagharek's 'victim' (though, crucially, she wouldn't accept that description) asked him, he may

⁷⁸¹ Ibid. 612.

⁷⁸² Ibid. 620.

well have done it precisely because he did not understand what she was saying to him. He was unable to apply any standards other than his own cultural ones, and, more precisely, the standards of a man who believes his own lover has just suffered rape, like Kar'uchai. He is a man in thrall to his own outrage, even though Kar'uchai has told him that rape is *not* what happened to her, not as he understands it. In other words, Isaac is congenitally incapable of dealing with the dilemma--its criteria are unthinkable to him--and I don't have the right answer. His decision is largely a refusal to make a decision; this appears to take sides against Yagharek, but that's more or less by default.

I didn't want to make a judgmental, moralistic ending. I tried to make the ending *about* judgmentalism, constructed around a deep moral dilemma and a query about our culture's faintly fetishistic critique of rape. Not, I hope it goes without saying, that rape doesn't need critiquing: it's just the particulars of the general critique that rather trouble me. That's what the whole conversation Isaac has with Karu'chai is about. And I wish more people had caught that. *I* don't know what the right thing to do was--I suspect there wasn't a right thing in that circumstance. I was very proud of the ending (I worried at it hard), but if you read it as a manifesto, then it must suck.⁷⁸³

In Isaac dan der Grimnebulin, Miéville depicts a range of moral engagements and decision-making processes. Some of these--the one Isaac employs with the garuda, for example--the author himself considers to be less well thought out than others, but as the

⁷⁸³ Miéville, "Reveling in Genre" 365-366.

reader sees in the case of Andrej, thinking out the morality of something does not necessarily make it right, or, for the intellectually honest, comfortable.

ii) Lin - *Perdido Street Station*

Although she drops out of the story relatively early, to resurface only at the very end, Lin's story is worth mentioning because it subverts some of the tropes that surround the representation of other races in fantasy. Lin, recall, is a khepri, with a humanoid body but a beetle--complete with legs and wings--for her head. She communicates through signing.

In an interview with Cheryl Morgan, Miéville says:

One of the things about genre fantasy that I loathe is that race becomes a pigeonhole for character type. Your elf is kind of deft and mysterious, and your dwarf is always grumpy but the salt of the earth, and it becomes a way of defining character rather than actually dealing with culture.

[...]

Lin's relationship with her culture is very important in the book. She doesn't fit in with traditional khepri culture that she has abandoned, but she can't fit in with human culture either because of her khepri upbringing. She is discomforted in both of them. And that's an attempt to write a bit more realistically about culture than some other genre writers.

[...]

One of the things that is dangerous about genre fantasy and science fiction is that ethnic stereotyping is true. It is absolutely the case that trolls are stupid and bad and like to smash things up. What I have tried to do in *Perdido* is have an idea of culture that is both constraining and enabling, but doesn't describe you in cold genetic terms.⁷⁸⁴

When Legolas or Korendil speak as elves, the reader has no doubt that they can speak for all elves. Lin cannot, and will not, speak for all khepri. Even stripped of their history after a disaster called the Ravening, khepri do not have a monolithic culture. Lin grew up in a poor neighbourhood, practicing a minority khepri religion. After a brief flirtation with mainstream khepri culture, she rejected that too, becoming part of a succession of subversive art movements, embracing left-wing politics, moving to a human neighbourhood, and dating a human.

Lin's sculpture, although it requires khepri biology, is not khepri art. She is uncomfortable in khepri spaces, and critical of "the atmosphere of pious community"⁷⁸⁵ in the khepri ghetto of Kinken, thinking, "*On and on about community and the great khepri hive while the 'sisters' over in Creekside scrabble about for potatoes. You have nothing, surrounded by people that mock you as bugs, buy your art cheap and sell your food dear, but because there are others with even less you style yourselves protectors of the khepri way.*"⁷⁸⁶

Held hostage by the crime boss Mr. Motley, with half her mind devoured by slake moths, Lin does not fare well in the novel. But she does not die heroically, or even badly,

⁷⁸⁴ Miéville, interview with Morgan.

⁷⁸⁵ Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* 19.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid. 20.

removing her neatly from Isaac's world, leaving him free to perhaps pursue the love of the human Derkhan. Lin lives, grievously injured in mind and body, and apparently aware of it, and Isaac resolves to care for her.

The character of Lin represents, in urban fantasy, a leap forward in the representation of the Other. Lin is not a human, nor is she a slightly modified human, but neither is she a cipher, or someone with the authority to offer a single, monolithic khepri point of view. She can convey the city garuda's point of view to Isaac because she shares their experience of marginalization. Her difference from humans is both biological and cultural, but not reductive in any way; nor is it morally weighted.

iii) Bellis Coldwine - *The Scar*

An old lover of Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, Bellis Coldwine worries that after the events of *Perdido Street Station* she will be hunted by the militia, and attempts to flee to the New Crobuzonian colony of Nova Esperium. However, her ship is captured and assimilated by the floating city of Armada.

Bellis does not forge ties easily, and is uncomfortable with displays of emotion; moreover, she bitterly resents being captured by Armada. She is criticized by others throughout the novel for being cold and unfeeling. Nevertheless, several times after coming to Armada she finds herself in the position of having knowledge that she believes could save lives, and she goes to extraordinary lengths to act on that knowledge in what she believes to be the best way possible--even under the threat of severe punishment, even when a previous attempt was disastrous. Both times, she discovers that her good

intentions have been used for the political gain of others. She reflects, "So many truths have been kept from me. This violent, pointless voyage has been sopping with blood. I feel thick and sick with it. And that is all: contingent and brutal without meaning. There is nothing to be learnt here. No ecstatic forgetting. There is no redemption in the sea."⁷⁸⁷

Bellis' journey, over the course of the novel, has been one of discovering how she has been used by powers greater than herself. However, at the end, she also acknowledges her own complicity:

And as I tell you [everything that has happened to me], I come to understand that I have been manipulated, used at every step of the way, that even when I was not a translator, I passed on others' messages. I find myself detached from such knowledge.

It is not that I do not care. Not that I am not angry at being used, or, gods and Jabber help me, for the awful, brute times I was used to bring about.

But even when I spoke for others (wittingly or not), I was doing things for myself. I have been present throughout all this, my own fact. And besides, as I sit here, ten thousand miles from New Crobuzon, on the other side of foreign seas, I know that we are heading slowly home. And though sadness and the guilt are stitched indelibly to me with my scars, two things are clear.

The first is that everything has changed. I cannot be used anymore. Those days are over. I know too much. What I do now, I do for me. And I feel, for all that

⁷⁸⁷ Miéville, *The Scar* 575.

has happened, as if it is *now*, only now in *these* days, that *my* journey is beginning. I feel as if this--even all this--has been a prologue.⁷⁸⁸

Bellis' use of existing systems and circumstances to pursue her own aims has made her act in the service of those systems and circumstances, even when the results are things that she does not support. Her admission of this may prompt readers to examine how their own choices serve ends they themselves may not agree with.

iv) Cutter - *Iron Council*

In *Iron Council*, Cutter is a shopkeeper and a member of the caucus that constitutes the leadership of New Crobuzon's organized left wing. He is in love with Judah Low, a golem-maker who helped found Iron Council but lives in New Crobuzon. When the novel opens, the caucus has apparently declined to send an official delegation to warn Iron Council that New Crobuzon is coming for it, so Judah has left alone, and Cutter has followed him. Hot on his trail are a few other caucus members who are sympathetic, but who die one by one. They are even willing to hijack a ship in order to find Judah--although Cutter and his party carefully ensure that the crew of the ship are not hurt, and have provisions.⁷⁸⁹

Cutter cares about Iron Council and he cares about the Caucus and the Collective, and of course he cares about social justice, but he is "never more than a suspicious fellow-traveller",⁷⁹⁰ having been brought into politics by Judah. More than anything, he is

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid. 577-578.

⁷⁸⁹ Miéville, *Iron Council* 26.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid. 108.

motivated by his only partially requited love for Judah. But after the defeat of the rebellion and Judah's death, he joins the staff of the *Runagate Rampant*.

Miéville has said in an interview:

I was expecting people to talk a lot about the gay theme in *Iron Council*. The main character of *Iron Council* is gay and almost no one has talked about it. It hasn't been the source of controversy or congratulation. And I'm quite pleased with that. I feel like I owe the field and readers an apology, because maybe at some unspoken level, I was thinking, 'Ha, now I've written this book and it will challenge you because it is about gay people.' In fact, I think that the genre and readers are much more mature than some of us self-styled radicals and dissidents make them out to be.⁷⁹¹

Iron Council is, in part, a way of exploring the politics of sexuality in Bas-Lag.

Same-sex partnerships are illegal in New Crobuzon⁷⁹², and even the Caucus "studiously did not judge Cutter, but only, he had twice been told, because good insurrectionists did not blame victims for being distorted by a sick society."⁷⁹³ Cutter himself rejects many aspects of New Crobuzon's gay culture⁷⁹⁴--aspects that are later valorized in Howl Barrow. As the uprising is crushed and the Collective falls, there are indications that prevailing attitudes, at least in New Crobuzon's activist community, may change. Howl Barrow, the gay village, is part of the Collective, and they "had been greeted with disgust; then with forbearance, as they fought without restraint; then with

⁷⁹¹ China Miéville, interview with Lou Anders, *The Believer*, April 2005, 12 June 2011 <http://www.believmag.com/issues/200504/?read=interview_mieville>.

⁷⁹² Miéville, *Iron Council* 127.

⁷⁹³ Ibid. 128.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid. 126.

exasperated affection.”⁷⁹⁵ They fall to the militia, but not before making a heroic last stand. One observer reports, “A liability? They were *lions*. They came in formation, firing, in their dresses. [...] Hadn’t eaten anything but stale bread and rat meat for days, and they fought like gladiators in Shankell. It took motorguns to cut them down. And they went out shouting and kissing each other.”⁷⁹⁶ With the heroism of Howl Barrow, and a gay man at the head of *The Runagate Rampant*, it seems likely that even though the Collective has failed, one segment of New Crobuzon society will fare better. Although Cutter is perhaps not as innovative a fantasy character as Miéville intended him to be, the author uses him to explore the ways in which systemic oppression can be taken up and reproduced by characters who endeavour to be critical of that same oppression.

v) Judah Low - *Iron Council*

Judah Low is named--in our universe, if not the necessarily the novel’s universe--after the rabbi who created the golem in Jewish mythology. Like the original golem, created to protect the Jewish ghetto in Prague from anti-Semitic invaders, his golems fight for the oppressed.

In a long flashback near the beginning of *Iron Council*, Judah’s origins are explained. He goes to work for the railway as a young man, and while scouting the swamps, falls in with a tribe of stiltspear. He learns their language and their golem-making, and struggles to learn as much of their culture as he can. But then the railroad goes through, the swamp is filled in, and the stiltspear are slaughtered, demonstrating to Judah that there are serious

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid. 444.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid. 471.

problems with the leadership of the railway and its relationship to those in its path. Judah serves a succession of masters in the raucous, lawless community that follows the railroad, each of whom he leaves when they threaten to harm innocent people, at the behest of “[t]he thing [Judah] has felt born within him, a creature of his congealed concern”⁷⁹⁷. Finally he uses his golem-making powers to save a family of trow threatened by the railroad. He knows that others will come, that “the trow will be eradicated and their homes lost to history, but he will not be party to it, and he has tried to stand in its way.”⁷⁹⁸

After this, he takes up with a village girl named Ann-Hari, and after a brief sojourn in New Crobuzon, during which he hones his golemetry, they return to the railroad separately, organizing for better pay, a union, and rights for the Remade. Growing unrest, a massacre of the Remade who dared to protest the ill treatment of one of their own⁷⁹⁹, and a delay with the pay train leads to a strike, and ultimately a full-scale revolt in which the railroad workers, sex workers, and Remade slaves take over the train. Judah uses his golems to help the newly formed Iron Council beat back the gendarmes and the New Crobuzon militia, and flee into the Cacotopic Stain, before he returns to New Crobuzon to be Iron Council’s “bard”⁸⁰⁰, making sure that New Crobuzonians know the train did not just disappear, but was taken over by the people.

When it hears that it is no longer safe, and rebellion is brewing in New Crobuzon, Iron Council returns to the city, but it becomes clear that the rebellion has been quelled, the emerging Collective defeated, before they can arrive. They continue anyway, and Judah’s last act is to create a time golem to trap Iron Council, to simultaneously protect it from the

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid. 185.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid. 191.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid. 222.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid. 289.

militia and serve as an assurance to the people of New Crobuzon that rebellion can work, has worked, and will work again. The reader has no access to the specific thought processes that lead him to suspend Iron Council in time, but he tells Cutter, “I saved them.”⁸⁰¹ To Ann-Hari he says, “Would you have had them *die*? [...] They’re safe now. The Iron Council remains.”⁸⁰² For this Ann-Hari shoots him and kills him, charging, “Iron Council was never yours. You don’t get to choose. You don’t decide when is the right time, when it fits your story. [...] [W]e made our decision, and it was *not yours*.”⁸⁰³

The novel consistently frames Judah in holy terms. He speaks with “priestly certainty.”⁸⁰⁴ When Cutter’s group finds him, he “did not seek leadership, did nothing but say he would continue and that they could come, but they became his followers, as they always did.”⁸⁰⁵ Cutter recalls that his physical relationship with Judah is “an act of patrician friendship, a saintly generosity.”⁸⁰⁶ When Judah finds Cutter in the arms of another man, he gives him “a slow beatific smile. A benediction.”⁸⁰⁷ And when Ann-Hari explains why she has to kill him, she says, “You were [...] never our saviour.”⁸⁰⁸ Judah goes willingly to his death, too; Cutter finds himself thinking of all the ways that Judah could use his golemetry to save himself, but he does not.⁸⁰⁹

Judah’s moral consciousness is shaped by seeing different facets of oppression, but his goodness is presented as something instinctive, alien to himself--a sort of alienness usually reserved for representations of evil. When he first uses his golemetry to save the

⁸⁰¹ Ibid. 543.

⁸⁰² Ibid. 551.

⁸⁰³ Ibid. 552.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid. 106.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid. 108.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid. 127.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid. 135.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid. 552.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid. 553-554.

throw, “inside him the worm of uncertainty, the oddity that is not a conscience but an awareness of wrong, a *goodness*, is uncoiling. [...] It moves in him and secretes disgust and anger he is sure are not *his*, but that stain him, and whether they are his or not he feels them.”⁸¹⁰ This inborn force for good is certainly a far cry from Lackey’s Warriors of the Light, and unlike them, as holy as it may be, it is not unquestionably right. Judah prevents a slaughter by changing Iron Council into a symbol of hope, but he does it by appropriating stiltspear magic and violating the principles of the Council itself.

vi) Ori - *Iron Council*

The first time Ori Ciuraz appears in *Iron Council*, he is rioting. A young leftist activist, he is frustrated with what he sees as widespread apathy and the slow pace of change. He tells an associate that he is “[t]ired of *Runagate Rampant*, forever saying what’s what but never *doing* anything, tired of waiting for change which don’t come.”⁸¹¹ A day labourer who grew up in the impoverished neighbourhood of Dog Fenn⁸¹², Ori aspires to be a hero like Jack Half-a-Prayer (the fReemade renegade of a generation ago).

At the soup kitchen where Ori helps out occasionally, he finds Spiral Jacobs, an old homeless man who claims to have run with Half-a-Prayer. Jacobs gives Ori directions to get him into the outlaw Toro’s gang, which has been making headlines with its subversive criminal acts, and later gives him a great deal of money to finance Toro’s plans. Ori has few qualms about picking pockets and cutting purses to pass one of their loyalty tests, and in

⁸¹⁰ Ibid. 190.

⁸¹¹ Ibid. 81.

⁸¹² Ibid. 301.

fact begins to enjoy the adventure.⁸¹³ Toro's gang uses crime to finance its activities, and he accepts without question that the crime is either necessary to the cause or "insurrectionary revenge"⁸¹⁴:

Sometimes he would learn only when he heard or read of another heist, the freeing of prisoners from a punishment factory, the murder of some rich old couple in Flag Hill. That last outraged the papers, who excoriated Toro for the killing of innocents. Ori wondered sourly what it was the victims had done, how many they had Remade or executed. He rummaged in the gang's box of militia spoils, the badges and contracts of office, but could find nothing of the uptown couple to tell why they had been targeted.⁸¹⁵

Ori's response is the opposite of what the media is trying to stir up, but it is nevertheless uncritical. While other groups on the left call for strikes and organize cross-race unions, Toro's gang plots to assassinate the mayor. Ori believes that the killing will be the symbolic act that sparks a revolution.

Ori has contempt, however, for the people in whose interests he is supposedly acting. Speaking with an associate who is on the caucus, he scorns the "brainless *commonalty*[".]"⁸¹⁶ He tells her, "What we're doing, what *we're* doing...we need to *wake*

⁸¹³ Ibid. 94.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid. 304.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid. 305.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid. 362.

people up.” The associate replies, “They’re already awake, Jack. That’s what you don’t see.”⁸¹⁷

Ori becomes uneasy when he realizes that the combat veteran who he has brought into their gang is teaching them militia techniques, and has “to tell himself several times, until he was sure of it, that he was where he was meant to be.”⁸¹⁸ But his real misgivings come when he discovers that Toro’s gang killed the old couple from Flag Hill only because the gang needed the couple’s house as a base to invade from:

Something welled in him. All the uncertainty, the desperate lack of knowledge, then the weight of knowledge but vacillation of ideas the shameful hash of theory that had sent him to the Runagaters, to all the different sects and dissidents, looking for something to ground him, a political home, which he had found in the anger and anarchist passion of Toro. His uncertainty came back. He knew what he felt--that this was a dreadful thing, that he was aghast--but he remembered the exhortations to *contextualise*, always to have context, that the Runagaters above all had always stressed.

*If one death’ll stop ten, ain’t it better? If two deaths’ll save a city?*⁸¹⁹

Ori talks himself back into supporting the plan, and Old Shoulder, another member of the gang, sees his discomfort and tells him, “[N]o, it ain’t good. Don’t presume, Ori, that

⁸¹⁷ Ibid. 365.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid. 372.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid. 370.

there's no guilt and pain."⁸²⁰ The gang draws Ori back in by congratulating him on the courage to do terrible work in the service of a greater good, just as Fred Katz recounts that Himmler congratulated SS soldiers "for having the fortitude and strength to go through with these horrible tasks"⁸²¹ in the service of "a larger, nobler reality."⁸²² Recall also Isaac's gang, and their refusal to convince themselves to accept their use of Andrej as a sacrifice. Part of Ori's moral failing is that he is able to make himself certain, to talk himself into the rightness of his actions and out of recognizing the full personhood of his group's victims, to soothe his conscience about deeds that should never be any less than terrible.

When the deed has been done, when the mayor is dead, Toro removes her bull's head helmet and reveals her real purpose: many years ago she was Remade, by the judge who is the mayor's lover, for accidentally killing her own child, Cecile. This assassination, Toro tells the judge, is "[f]rom the men you made machines, the women you made monsters. Tanks, snail-girls, panto-horses, industry engines. And from all them you locked away in the toilets you call jails. And from all them on the run in case you find them. And from me, and from Cecile[.]"⁸²³ To Ori, that the assassination could be anything other than purely political is unacceptable, and regards Toro's personal vendetta as a kind of betrayal. He tells her, "You shouldn't have used us like this. You used us hard. You had no right."⁸²⁴ Disillusioned, Ori uses magic to escape, with Toro's blessing--he is the only one of the gang to survive--and stumbles into the New Crobuzon Collective. The revolution he wanted so much has already happened, and he missed it.

⁸²⁰ Ibid. 370.

⁸²¹ Katz 69.

⁸²² Ibid. 69.

⁸²³ Miéville, *Iron Council* 395.

⁸²⁴ Ibid. 396.

Worse, his friend and helper Spiral Jacobs is actually Tesh's ambassador, and the spirals he draws on walls are preparations for a thaumaturgical doomsday weapon.⁸²⁵ He sent Ori to Toro, and supported the assassination effort (and may even have helped to engineer the rebellion), to create a diversion while setting up the spell. A remorseful Ori is able to lead Cutter and Judah's party to Jacobs, although the invincible Jacobs tires of Ori's efforts to hit him, and kills him.⁸²⁶

With Cutter and Judah is Qurabin, a monk from lands abandoned by Tesh, and the monk is able to use their discipline to reverse the spell.⁸²⁷ New Crobuzon's war with Tesh is won by people who do not support it, who have themselves been rejected by both states and branded as enemies.

Ori, like Bellis Coldwine, has been the tool of forces greater than himself. However, he does not come across as sympathetically as she does. His own impatience has made him ripe for manipulation, and his willingness to do harm, coupled with his contempt for his fellow activists and the people they strive to help, suggest that he prefers the aesthetics of revolution to the ethics of social justice.

All of Miéville's major characters in Bas-Lag are allied, to one degree or another, with a recognizable left wing. They are all benevolent, but they have blind spots, they fail to live up to their own ideals, and they are constrained by their circumstances, often in ways that lead them to make choices that do great harm. The texts do not justify these choices, and for that matter, neither do many of the characters themselves. Faced with their own failures, they acknowledge their mistakes, apologize, and try to do better.

⁸²⁵ Ibid. 431.

⁸²⁶ Ibid. 481.

⁸²⁷ Ibid. 484.

Sometimes, as for Bellis Coldwine, their efforts avail them nothing. Sometimes, as with Ori Ciuraz, the damage is done and no redemption is possible. However, even Ori is handled with compassion, by the author and by the other characters.

vii) Tyador Borlú - *The City & The City*

Given the timbre of Miéville's other novels, Tyador Borlú is a very unlikely narrator and protagonist: a police officer, one who is both good at his job and sympathetic. He heads the investigation of the death of a young woman who at first appears to be a sex worker, but turns out to be an American graduate student.

In the opening pages, Borlú comes across as someone who rejects easy explanations, and listens to people regardless of their status. He believes a junior officer, Lizbyet Corwi, who says there are inconsistencies about the body that suggest the young victim was not a prostitute.⁸²⁸ It looks like the case will be handed over to the sterner authorities in Breach, allowing Borlú to wash his hands of it, but after meeting her grieving parents at the airport, Borlú continues to investigate, telling Corwi, "She does deserve [Breach]. And she'll get them. [...] For the next little while she's got us."⁸²⁹

Of police brutality of the sort rampant in the New Crobuzon novels, Borlú says, "There are some suspects that methodology works on, who need to fall down stairs during an interrogation"⁸³⁰, but this observation is tucked in amid his criticism of a colleague for

⁸²⁸ Miéville, *The City & The City* 9.

⁸²⁹ Ibid. 84.

⁸³⁰ Ibid. 15.

“switch[ing] to hard questioning too easily.”⁸³¹ When his investigation takes him to Ul Qoma, and he and his Ul Qoman counterpart, Qassim Dhatt, question some unificationists about the anonymous phone call concerning the poster, Dhatt bullies them and roughs up one of their number.⁸³² Borlú claims the caller is not among them, even though he is. When Dhatt finds out, Borlú claims that he simply could not tell, and there is nothing in his own narration of events to confirm or contradict that.

Oddly, Borlú does not seem to engage in moral reasoning, or if he does, the reader has no access to those thoughts. He worries at the puzzle of Mahalia Geary and Orciny, he solves problems, he even asks difficult questions about the power structures of the two cities, and Breach itself. But he never asks, “Is this right?”

This could be a matter of singlemindedness: Borlú’s job is to catch Mahalia Geary’s killer, and he will not let himself be dissuaded by anything, not even Breach. It could also be that in the format of the police procedural, which this novel somewhat mimics, moral reasoning is peripheral. More likely, however, it is intended to be read as an odd side effect of the border between Beszel and Ul Qoma. The constant shoring up of psychic borders is taxing, the stakes too high to allow distraction,⁸³³ and moral reasoning might lead one to dangerous places. Even when moral reasoning is done--and it is hard to believe that Borlú simply does not do it--it must be done surreptitiously, certain conclusions reflexively ignored before they become conscious thought. The only anxieties the reader is allowed to see are those about Breach.

⁸³¹ Ibid. 15.

⁸³² Ibid. 162-164.

⁸³³ Fred Clark has written about this in American Evangelical Christian culture.

To catch Geary's killer, Borlú breaches the borders, and is taken into custody. However, the people who make up Breach have realized that something bigger is going on, and are threatened by the possibility that Orciny exists. Under the auspices of investigating the terms of Borlú's breach, they allow him to keep working on the Geary case, giving him full access to their resources. When the case is broken, Borlú is recruited to work for Breach.

This is a happy ending, of sorts. Borlú has sacrificed himself so that justice can be done for Mahalia Geary, and yet finds himself still alive, doing what he always did, but in the service of a different power, newly able to cross borders that he can realistically never respect again. But consider also that by assimilating him, Breach has neutralized any threat he might pose. Whatever Tyador Borlú is as an individual, he is now also a representative of a power that exists for reasons never fully articulated and possibly forgotten, is answerable to no one, and is an instrument of fear:

There may be others who proceed the traditional Breach way, the leveraging of intimidation, that self-styling as a night-fear, while I--using the siphoned-off information we filch online, the bugged phone calls from both cities, the networks of informants, the powers beyond any law, the centuries of fear, yes, too, sometimes, the intimations of other powers beyond us, of unknown shapes, that we are only avatars--was to investigate, as I have investigated for years.⁸³⁴

⁸³⁴ Miéville, *The City & The City* 311.

Borlú is a sympathetic police officer, a decent human being who does the best job he can in the service of justice. As an agent of Breach, however, he serves a power that is arbitrary and unjust, and the knowledge that he has gained about its arbitrariness and unjustness is subsumed.

viii) Deeba Resham - *Un Lun Dun*

Un Lun Dun begins with a red herring: the novel appears to centre on Zanna Moon, a tall, blonde girl who seems to shine with an inner light. Her form appears in the clouds⁸³⁵; animals stop to watch her; people go out of their ways to greet her as the *Choisi*, or, as the book spells it, the Shwazzy, the Chosen One. She and her best friend Deeba find their way into UnLondon and discover the prophecy that says Zanna will triumph over the books's principle antagonist, the Smog...but at their very first skirmish, Zanna is defeated. Upon her return to London with Deeba, she remembers nothing.

Deeba, however, learns information that contradicts reassurances by their supposed ally, and realizes that UnLondon has been betrayed.⁸³⁶ At first, she assures herself it will be fine, and is ashamed to find herself thinking, "*Besides, even if something terrible does happen, you don't need to know about it.*"⁸³⁷ After some agonizing, she decides to get word to UnLondoners.⁸³⁸ Finally, she finds a way back to UnLondon, and returns as the UnChosen.

⁸³⁵ Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* 7.

⁸³⁶ Ibid. 157.

⁸³⁷ Ibid. 159. Italics original.

⁸³⁸ Ibid. 160.

Deeba is small, dark (the novel never specifies her ethnicity, but it is not unreasonable to see her as a person of colour, a rare protagonist in genre fantasy), unkempt, and nondescript. As someone whose experiences with Zanna have accustomed her to being on the periphery, she readily accepts the personhood of the various types of people she meets, and even adopts an animated milk carton that Zanna refers to as “your manky pet”.⁸³⁹ While Zanna becomes preoccupied with her role as the Chosen One, Deeba is the one who expresses concern about the people who have put themselves in harm’s way to protect the girls.⁸⁴⁰

Deeba’s great strength lies in her emancipatory tendencies. As a girl who has had to, of necessity, fill a role different from that prescribed for her, she fights her enemies by empowering the oppressed, who then decide to help her. For example, in one episode she runs afoul of Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Talklands and the only one there allowed to speak. His words become creatures, utterlings, which he uses to capture Deeba and her friends.⁸⁴¹ Deeba defeats Speaker by pointing out that his power is not absolute, because the meaning of words is not fixed. Hearing this, the utterlings rebel, and three of them join Deeba’s party.⁸⁴² When the words begin to fade, Deeba hits on the idea of reviving them by having them learn to say themselves.⁸⁴³

In addition to the treacherous ally Benjamin Unstible--who is really Unstible’s Smog-
animated corpse--another false friend is Brokkenbroll, the Unbrellissimo, who governs
broken and discarded umbrellas, or “unbrellas,” who do his bidding. He has impregnated

⁸³⁹ Ibid. 61.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid. 84.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid. 263.

⁸⁴² Ibid. 268-271.

⁸⁴³ Ibid. 411, 452.

their fabric with a Smog-proof formulation and given them to Un Lun Dun's citizenry, and with them, the people have become complacent, and accustomed to coexisting with the Smog. Imprisoned in Unstible's factory, guarded by Brokkenbroll's umbrella army, Deeba begins repairing them, to turn them into "rebrellas." This breaks Brokkenbroll's control over them, and they are happy to protect the humans who wield them.⁸⁴⁴ In this book, aimed at children, the fundamental heroic act is not rescuing, or reordering of the world, but rather the recognition of agency.

Deeba's least proud moment as a heroine comes when she stumbles into Wraithtown, a ghost ghetto in UnLondon. The ghosts are the Remade of the *Un Lun Dun* universe, universally and reflexively hated, blamed for all misfortune. Deeba suspects that the real Benjamin Unstible is dead, and Wraithtown keeps records of new arrivals, but Deeba's also been told that ghosts are out to possess the living. Unable to hear what the wraiths are saying, she shouts at them: "No one come close[.] [...] I'm watching. First sign of anyone trying to possess me, I'll... [...] Don't come no closer! I know what you're trying to do! I just need one piece of information, and then I'm gone."⁸⁴⁵ Like Grimnebulin facing New Crobuzon's garuda, she finds herself out of her depth in a neighbourhood of those less privileged than herself, and makes some bad decisions.

Hemi, the child of a ghost and a living person, whose previous encounters with her have been ambiguous, retorts, "Why'd any of us want your nasty body? [...] You barge in here, [...] spouting nonsense, and then you demand help?"⁸⁴⁶ Deeba's apology is a bit grudging, and the ghosts help her very reluctantly, but later, when she leads the forces of

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid. 425.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid. 184-185.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid. 187.

UnLondon against the Smog, a small Wraithtown contingent shows up. The living have been spreading rumours that the ghosts have been helping the main source of antagonism, the Smog, and are not only surprised to see them, but skeptical about their ability to do anything at all. In this environment, Deeba makes a point of greeting the ghosts personally, telling them, “I just wanted to say thank you very much for coming[.] [...] I’m really glad you’re here.”⁸⁴⁷

Deeba falters again when the London Metropolitan Police arrest her at the behest of Murgatroyd, employee of the traitorous Minister of the Environment, who has dealt with the Smog in London by sending it to UnLondon. Although one of the officers is thoroughly unpleasant⁸⁴⁸, the other promises that they will protect her if she will just let them take her home. Deeba is ready to go with them, telling Hemi, “It’s my family... It’s a way back... And look at us. Look at *me*. I’m *not the Shwazzy*. We’ve got *no chance* against the Smog... But they can protect me. And Zanna.”⁸⁴⁹ But as she prepares to go with them, she sees both officers, both good cop and bad cop, share a triumphant glance⁸⁵⁰ that reminds her that the power structures of both UnLondon and London Above are bound up with the Smog, and regains her resolve.

Deeba is at first daunted by UnLondon and its systems of governance, but as she discovers that they can be mistaken or unjust, her questioning of them becomes reflexive. One of the catalysts that activates her critical faculties is the failure of the prophecies in the Book, which structures Zanna’s quest like a traditional fantasy. Not only does it place too

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid. 380.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid. 361-2.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid. 363.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid. 364.

much importance on the blonde, charismatic Chosen One, but it also names Deeba as the funny sidekick, an identity she rejects.

When she leaves UnLondon at the end of the story, and is warned that she will not be able to come back because “Every time you breach the Odd, the membrane between two whole *universes* is strained”⁸⁵¹, she retorts, “People are *always* going between, and you don’t see either universe collapsing, do you? [...] You just think it’s hard to go between the two because you’ve always thought it must be. You’re just saying that ‘cause you sort of think you should.”⁸⁵² And upon her return to London, she confronts the Smog-affiliated Minister of the Environment⁸⁵³, bringing her knowledge from UnLondon to bear on London Above’s power structures. Like any heroine of a children’s fantasy, Deeba is able to apply her experiences to the real world, but instead of finding her place in the adult world, she sets out to change it.

ix) Billy Harrow - *Kraken*

Billy Harrow is perhaps the least colourful of Miéville’s protagonists--rightly, as it turns out; it stands to reason that a bottle-prophet would be colourless. He is in his late twenties, and cultivates the slightly scruffy image of a cool scientist.⁸⁵⁴ His one oddity is an invented one: at a party, he claimed to be the world’s first test tube baby⁸⁵⁵, and that is what attracted the museum’s mnemophylax to him.⁸⁵⁶ At work, the mnemophylax gives

⁸⁵¹ Ibid. 460.

⁸⁵² Ibid. 461.

⁸⁵³ Ibid. 471.

⁸⁵⁴ Miéville, *Kraken* 4.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid. 7.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid. 310.

him a certain facility with bottled specimens; when the events of the novel drive him into the world of London magic, it protects him from Officer Collingswood's magically enforced gag order, and from the assassins Goss and Subby.

The Teuthists, believing that the magic they sense on Billy identifies him as the prophet of *Architeuthis*, give him squid ink so that he will have prophetic dreams.⁸⁵⁷ One of these reveals the nature of his heroism:

Then a cartoon, that he recognised, that long-loved story of bottles dancing while a chemist slept, and not a cephalopod to be seen, then for a moment he was Tintin was what he was, in some Tintin dream, and Captain Haddock came at him corkscrew in hand because he was a bottle, but nothing could get at him and he was not afraid, then he was with a brown-haired woman he recognized as Virginia Woolf if you please ignoring the squid at her window, which looked quite forlorn, powerless and neglected, and she was telling Billy instead that he was an unorthodox hero, according to an unusual definition, and he was in some classical land and it was all a catastrophe, a fiasco, the word came, but if it was why did he feel strong?⁸⁵⁸

This is a sly reference to Woolf's glossary in *The Three Guineas*, in which "hero" is defined as "bottle".⁸⁵⁹ Marginalia mentions this playful equivocation early in the book⁸⁶⁰, and it

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid. 96.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid. 251-252.

⁸⁵⁹ Ursula Le Guin, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 150.

⁸⁶⁰ Miéville, *Kraken* 15.

also titles the book's last section. Billy is a bottle-hero, and his superpower is a mediating function, the ability to preserve, to present, to frame.

The bottle-hero is emblematic of one of the book's themes. The importance of metaphoric potency in this London means that belief is a powerful force, which is nothing new in fantasy...but Miéville concentrates on the *medium* of the message and its power to shape belief. Grisamentum and Tattoo, two of the principle antagonists, are embodied in ink. The familiars, the usually unacknowledged go-betweens of magicians, both good and bad alike, are on strike in this novel, calling attention to the labour they do. One of the protagonists is named Marginalia. And the other protagonist, Billy, comes into his power by discovering that he is a prophet of a medium, the bottle, rather than what the bottle contains. One of the climactic battles in the text is Billy's ontological struggle to change the giant squid, whose inky essence Grisamentum has just consumed, from the god Kraken who will render Grisamentum tremendously powerful, to a simple specimen under Billy's control.⁸⁶¹

x) Marginalia - *Kraken*

Marginalia is *Kraken*'s other protagonist, "attractive and a little heavy, somewhat older[...], too old for the dilute emo-goth look she maintained."⁸⁶² Leon, her boyfriend and Billy's best friend, is killed by Goss and Subby when they take Billy. Marge has far less space in the book than Billy, but like Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, as a heavier, older person

⁸⁶¹ Ibid. 487-489.

⁸⁶² Ibid. 15.

whose job does not offer her the chance to take large amounts of time off, she defies some of the conventions of the fantasy genre.

Sensibly, Marginalia's first response is to contact the police about Leon's disappearance, but they do nothing, and when Billy escapes from the supernatural thugs Goss and Subby, they come to her for information. Billy's message--delivered via the streetlights, which flicker in Morse code⁸⁶³--that Leon is dead and she should stay away only galvanizes her. She begins researching London's magic subculture, purchases protection against Goss and Subby, and eventually makes contact with Paul, the human on whom Tattoo is inscribed, after he escapes the crime boss' control.

Like generations of heroines before her, including Sara Kendall and Imogene Yeck, Marginalia pursues magic after being told it is too dangerous, but unlike them, she does not find the world she enters bending to revolve around her. Instead, her curiosity, tenacity, and resourcefulness put her in the right place first to play a role in the killing of Goss and Subby⁸⁶⁴, and then to arrange to put *Architeuthis* under the protection of the sea. Marge is a conduit for other people's plans, but in a novel that celebrates such conduits, that does not diminish her role or her heroism.

Sources of Evil

As with Charles de Lint's work, it is less appropriate to talk about evil in Miéville's work than antagonism. Miéville acknowledges that the world, and actions that arise in response to the world, are complex. He is less meticulous than de Lint about giving

⁸⁶³ Ibid. 204.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid. 452, 455.

unsympathetic characters complex motivations--New Crobuzon mayors Bentham Rudgutter and Eliza Stem-Fulcher are examples--but Miéville has other aspects of the New Crobuzon novels do this work. For example, these are the headlines that appear over the course of *Iron Council*:

THE MONSTROUS WITHOUT--AND WITHIN.

NEW CROBUZON'S TWIN ENEMIES: THE WATCHER AND THE TREACHEROUS.

NIGHT OF SHAME.⁸⁶⁵

DEMANDS TO PARLIAMENT

XENIAN GANGS

SEDITIONIST CAUCUS⁸⁶⁶

These headlines resemble tabloid headlines in the British and North American press. The reader is aware of the rationale behind the real headlines, and may even share the headlines' interpretations of events. No complex explanations are needed for Rudgutter or Stem-Fulcher because they are presumably operating based on logic and interpretations of events that the European or North American reader sees every day.⁸⁶⁷ Readers are not conditioned to see these interpretations as evil or wrong, but Miéville shows the harm and injustice that result.

In Miéville's work, there are several instances where antagonism and destructiveness are not coupled with moral culpability, and these are best categorized as

⁸⁶⁵ Miéville, *Iron Council* 361.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid. 385.

⁸⁶⁷ But the reader has access to a different version of the events behind the fantasy headlines, and might be tempted to wonder, in light of this, about the lived experiences behind some real-world headlines.

natural evil. The Cacotopic Stain in *Iron Council*, for example, or the Scar in *The Scar*, are more akin to (stationary, chronic) natural disasters than to villains.

The most striking examples of natural evil in Miéville's work are, of course, the slake moths. Hailing--according to Vermishank--from a place called the Fractured Land⁸⁶⁸, the moths feed on sentient minds. They are not malicious creatures, but they are predators who enjoy feeding, and the things that they must do to ensure their continued existence are incompatible with the well-being of New Crobuzon. The moths are beautiful, even sympathetic. The one that escapes Isaac's lab seeks out its siblings, imprisoned in Mr. Motley's facilities, and liberates them at great personal risk, moved by "deeply encoded sympathy for its own kind[.]"⁸⁶⁹ After Isaac's team destroys the slake-moth eggs, the layer "ran its hands through the viscid scum that had been its eggs. It hooted and crooned."⁸⁷⁰ And there is pathos in the death of the last moth:

If its family had survived, if it had been confident that it could return to its siblings, that they would hunt together again, it might not have panicked. If it had not witnessed a carnage of its kind, an impossible blast of poisonous vapour that enticed its brothersisters in and burst them, the moth would not have been insane with fear and anger, and it might not have become frenzied and lashed out, trapping itself further.⁸⁷¹

⁸⁶⁸ Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* 325.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid. 223.

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid. 485.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid. 588.

The slake-moths are not *bad*; they are creatures whose interests compete with human interests, and who are capable of great destruction. If there is wrongdoing involved in their depredations, it is that of the humans who brought them to New Crobuzon.

Another species presented as natural evil in Bas-Lag is the handlers, hand-shaped creatures who attach themselves to living bodies:

During one of the riot crises a few years back Stem-Fulcher announced that they've, whatever, *made contact*, and that they were all misunderstood.' The handlers, figures of terror for centuries, the feral hands come from corpses (some said), who were devils escaped from hell (some said), who took over the minds of their hosts and made their bodies into something much more than they had been. If the condemned are to die anyway, Stem-Fulcher had said, and the city is in need of help the handlers can give, it is foolish sentimentality not to draw an obvious conclusion. And of course they would be tightly controlled.⁸⁷²

The handlers are akin to a sentient zombie plague, commandeering bodies and using them for ill, making them act in ways that defy their personhood, and the conventional understanding of the way that bodies should act.

Although handlers are disgusting, and capable of doing great harm, they are never shown acting in unambiguously destructive ways. They are part of the government effort to kill the slake-moths, and a handler pursues Cutter and his gang when they

⁸⁷² Miéville, *Iron Council* 411.

search for Judah. But when handlers attack against the Collective, a handler *in* the Collective surfaces:

Civil wars made for unlikely allies. There were those handlers that for whatever reasons opposed their brothersisters--whether odd altruism or a politic calculation, the Collective's negotiators never knew. It may have sickened the negotiators to do deals with these symbols of corruption and parasite cunning, but they would turn nothing down now.⁸⁷³

In this light, it appears that despite their ability to evoke visceral horror, and their survival only at the expense of their hosts, handlers are capable of choosing sides and acting for what they feel to be the greater good. The handlers in the employ of New Crobuzon are disturbing because their method of survival undermines the autonomy of their sentient hosts, but they are wrong because they are allied with an oppressive political power.

A final, playful example of natural evil, from outside of the Bas-Lag universe, is that of the giraffes in UnLondon. In *Un Lun Dun*, giraffes are bloodthirsty carnivores. Bus Conductor Jones tells Zanna and Deeba, "They've done a good job making people believe that those hippy refugees in the zoo are normal giraffes. Next you'll tell me that they've got long necks so they can reach high leaves! Nothing to do with waving the bloody skins of their victims like flags, of course."⁸⁷⁴ The giraffes of UnLondon are there less to provide genuine antagonism, and more to contravene expectations.

⁸⁷³ Ibid. 440.

⁸⁷⁴ Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* 58.

What is the difference between a slake-moth or a handlinger, which harm humans because it is their nature to harm humans, and Lackey's Ice Lord from *The Wizard of London*, which harms humans because it is evil? Handlingers and slake-moths are dependent on humans for their existence. They are like de Lint's *anamithim* in that regard. Harming human beings is a matter of survival rather than of choice. The Ice Lord, on the other hand, appears to have a choice, and seeks to cover Great Britain in ice for the sake of the expansion of its territory, rather than out of any biological necessity.

In addition to natural evil, there are also three instances of what is arguably essential evil in Miéville's books, all of them complicated and made playful by their respective contexts in a way that suggests that Miéville does not believe essential evil is a concept transferable to the real world. One of these is the Ambassador of Hell in *Perdido Street Station*. Demons have an embassy in New Crobuzon. Mayor Rudgutter seeks Hell's help with the slake-moths, and the consultation is a source of dry comedy. During their preparation, Vansetty, a technician who prepares thaumaturgic machinery, explains, "Course, in your old days, before I came into the profession, you had to use a live offering[.] [...] But we're not savages, are we? Science is a wonderful thing. [...] And there you go! The victimless sacrifice! [...] No learning stupid languages, either."⁸⁷⁵

This brief episode in the novel is gleefully decked with the trappings of the demonic:

The ambassador had an echo: half a second after he spoke his words were repeated in the appalling shriek of one undergoing torture. The screamed words

⁸⁷⁵ Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* 240-241.

were not loud. They were audible just beyond the walls of the room, as if they had soared up through miles of unearthly heat from some trench in Hell's floor.

'What can I do for you?' he continued (*What can I do for you?* came the soulless howl of misery).

[...]

Whenever Rudgutter blinked, for that infinitesimal moment, he saw the room and its occupant in very different forms. Through his eyelids, Rudgutter saw the inside of a slatted cage; iron bars moving like snakes; arcs of unthinkable force, a jagged, rippling maelstrom of heat. Where the ambassador sat, Rudgutter caught glimpses of a monstrous form. A hyaena's head stared at him, tongue lolling. Breasts with gnashing teeth. Hooves and claws.⁸⁷⁶

For all these trappings, for all that that demons from Hell are a freighted concept-- and for all that the Ambassador keeps trying to convince Rudgutter to sign over his soul-- the Ambassador does nothing wrong. He is unfailingly polite, although he is unable to furnish assistance. He is even willing to overlook a minor procedural irregularity⁸⁷⁷ in order to give Rudgutter the answers he needs. On the one hand, New Crobuzon's is a mayoralty willing to make literal deals with the devil; on the other, nothing suggests that devils are anything other than people with "different psychic models from our own[.]"⁸⁷⁸ And the demons are apparently powerless against slake-moths.⁸⁷⁹ Like the giraffes of

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid. 242.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid. 244.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid. 237.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid. 246.

UnLondon, the function of the Ambassador of Hell is to subvert the reader's expectations, but the episode also works to underscore just how dangerous the slake-moths are.

Another instance of essential evil is the Smog,⁸⁸⁰ the principal antagonist in *Un Lun Dun*. Miéville's handling of it is quite ingenious. It is not tempting, but it is created by things that tempt, such as reckless consumption and lack of forethought. Like high fantasy villains, it casts a literal pall over the world. It causes sickness and corruption: the reanimated Benjamin Unstible's face "looked terrible in the glow. He seemed plumper than she remembered, and his skin was oily and seeping and graying and unhealthy. His eyes were wide and bloodshot."⁸⁸¹ It draws strength from the bad behaviour of humans, some of which manifests as vicious competition. It views human beings as expendable. And once vanquished, it can return. Of course, considering that Tolkien formulated Sauron and Mordor partially in response to the ecological devastation of England, the parallels are not so surprising.⁸⁸²

The Smog is also the ultimate consumer. It tells Deeba, the young protagonist:

*I will go to the galleries and burn the pictures and have them in me. Because I like art, you see. [...] And books, [...] Lovely lovely books, all burning. Fires of paper and print. I will breathe in histories and stories, learn it all in the smoke. I learn and learn all the books you burn. But soon I'll choose what goes up. No more breathing leftovers then. I'll burn them all.*⁸⁸³

⁸⁸⁰ It has been suggested that "Smog" is a pun on *The Hobbit's* "Smaug."

⁸⁸¹ Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* 223.

⁸⁸² Smog may, in fact, be a pun on Smaug, the dragon antagonist in *The Hobbit*.

⁸⁸³ Miéville, *Un Lun Dun*, 205.

Its appreciation of culture and thirst for learning is very human, but it is also inherently destructive, and the Smog takes joy in that destruction. It would be possible to portray the Smog as a natural evil, but in a book aimed at children, such *jouissance* on the part of the villain is permissible. (Desilet, with his anti-melodrama-under-any-circumstances stance, might question whether it is responsible.) The Smog is intelligent enough to carry on a conversation with human, but it is not interested in coexistence; it wants to consume everything, an echo of Eagleton's image of evil as capitalist boundlessness. Miéville is not so much creating a villain as anthropomorphizing an unambiguously bad aspect of modern urban life, so his portrayal is unlikely to unwittingly disenfranchise anyone.

In *The Scar*, the grindyflow, too, are initially presented as essentially evil, but this is a red herring. Secret agent Silas Fennec plays on protagonist Bellis Coldwine's fears in order to convince her to deliver a message to New Crobuzon for him: the grindyflow are preparing an attack, and they are more completely *other* than anything he has ever seen:

If the grindyflow take New Crobuzon, they wouldn't enslave us, or kill us, or even eat us all. They wouldn't do anything so...comprehensible. [...] We've never had any reason to be scared of them. But they have their own...methods, their own sciences and thaumaturgies. [...] They want New Crobuzon for the same reason every other state or savage on Ragamoll does. It's the richest, the biggest, the most powerful. Our industries, our resources, our militia--look at everything we have. But unlike Shankell or Dreer Samher or Neovadan or Yoraketché, The Gengris...The Gengris has a chance.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸⁴ Miéville, *The Scar* 163-164.

Fennec is revealed to have been lying about the true content of his message, but the grindylow are, in fact, after him, their murderous and relentless pursuit of him detailed in short interludes throughout the book.

The Scar was published in 2002. The idea that New Crobuzon is threatened by the radically other, who want it for its power and wealth, is an invocation of 9/11. But Miéville, in his treatment of the grindylow, also invokes the radically other creatures in the work of H.P. Lovecraft. Fennec's hesitations as he describes them evoke the indescribability of Lovecraftian monsters. Fennec has taken from the grindylow a statue that is "ugly [...] curled around itself like a fetus, etched with lines and coils that suggested fins or tentacles or folds of skin[,] [...] expert but unpleasant, seemingly designed to make the eye recoil."⁸⁸⁵ It is activated by kissing, and allows Fennec to "question" and "reconfigure" angles in the spaces around him.⁸⁸⁶ Over the course of the book, it begins to transform Fennec into something other than human: he can spit a sort of existential⁸⁸⁷ acid, and when captured, his chest is "mottled, clammy, and discolored in great patches of dirt-green and white [with] ragged flanges, extrusions like catfish whiskers, like fins."⁸⁸⁸ All of this--the failure of language to adequately describe, the disturbing statue, the alien geometry, the bodily transformation--is the stuff of Lovecraftian horror, utterly alien, as impervious to human reason as humans are to the pheromonal arguments of ants.

However, having raised all of this, Miéville then shows the reader that the grindylow, as different as they are, are not incomprehensible. They have no dreams of

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid. 241.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid. 243.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid. 446

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid. 449.

invasion; they want back what Fennec took from them. Bellis assumes they are after the grindyflow statue that Fennec has been using to walk unseen through Armada, but when she attempts to return their artifact to them, the grindyflow reply, "*Like primitives you think we abase before gods carved in rock? For hocus-pocus in trinkets?*"⁸⁸⁹ Grindyflow territory is inhospitable but rich in natural resources, and New Crobuzon wants to build a canal there, taking the land by force if it has to.⁸⁹⁰ Fennec was conducting the feasibility study, and the grindyflow want him and the information he gathered about them. The ruthless Lovecraftian horrors from the depths are defending themselves against the threat of economic development by New Crobuzon.

In fact, the greatest dangers in Miéville's work do not lie in dangerous creatures or malicious people. While there are good--not perfect--governments in Miéville's work, the Collective and Iron Council (both from *Iron Council*) being two of the best examples, one of the sources of antagonism in virtually all of Miéville's books is the authorities--the power structures of the society the book represents, and more specifically, their policing wing.

In New Crobuzon, this is the militia. They serve as both the city's police and its military--a problem because it blurs the line between ordinary citizens and enemy combatants. Although they are very active in all three Bas-Lag books, they are never shown doing anything beneficial or worthwhile. In *Perdido Street Station*, their efforts to capture or kill the slake moths are ineffectual, but they present a serious obstacle to protagonist Isaac and his friends, who have the best chance of defeating the moths. In *The Scar*, Bellis Coldwine flees the militia because they have been making Isaac's friends disappear and she fears she is next. When New Crobuzon attacks Armada, she realizes that as much as she

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid. 518, emphasis original.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid. 520-521.

wants to go home, she is ambivalent, remembering, “*I crossed the sea because I was afraid for my life[.] [...] Seeing the militia everywhere I looked. Afraid of the agents of the government.*”⁸⁹¹ Her fear poisons her other relationships: she tells Dou, “There’s a special kind of fear, a unique fear, when the militia are closing in on you. [...] Who’ve they got to? Who’ve they taken, tortured, corrupted, frightened, threatened, bought? Who can you trust?”⁸⁹²

In *Iron Council*, the militia is at its worst: after the Construct War twelve years ago, the militia, previously covert operators who practiced “policing by decentralized fear,”⁸⁹³ began to display their weapons openly⁸⁹⁴, and now the city is at war with Tesh, and in a constant state of emergency:

New Crobuzon’s government had mobilized. For two, three years now it had been the time of the Special Offensive. There was more death and more industry.

Everyone knew someone who had gone to war, or disappeared from a dockside pub. The shipyards of Tarmuth, that estuary satellite town, had begun to push out iron-clads and submersibles and had spurred something of a recovery, and the mills and forges of New Crobuzon followed, war turning their gears.

Guilds and unions were outlawed capriciously, or restricted and emasculated. There were new jobs now for some of those grown used to pauperism,

⁸⁹¹ Ibid. 410, emphasis original.

⁸⁹² Ibid. 455.

⁸⁹³ Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* 231.

⁸⁹⁴ Miéville, *Iron Council* 87.

though competition for them was cruel. New Crobuzon was stretched out, pulled taut.⁸⁹⁵

There are echoes of the Iraq War here, particularly in the words of Baron, an ex-militia man and veteran of the war:

‘They don’t want us. I seen things... What they done to us. What we done back. [...] It ain’t no war for liberty, nor for the Teshi, they hate us and we, we [...] hated them I tell you, and it was a, it’s *carnage* there, just plain murder, they sending their children out stuffed full of hex to make us melt[.]’⁸⁹⁶

Outside of the city, on the border with Tesh, the militia is even worse: between hunting the Iron Council and attacking the people on Tesh’s borders, surrounded by those they have been told are enemies, they cut a trail of murder and destruction across the landscape.⁸⁹⁷ Cutter and his band find farms burnt and families and livestock slaughtered, and catch up with the militia in time witness them killing the refugees from a recently destroyed town.⁸⁹⁸

The militia is cruel even to animals, in this universe, remaking them into war machines. Its members maraud the countryside in a rhino tank⁸⁹⁹, and with grotesque dogs, with “[t]he olfactory centres of their brains [...] hugely enlarged. Their crania were

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid. 80.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid. 312.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid. 113.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid. 117.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid. 115.

doughy and distended, as if their unshaped brains bubbled over.”⁹⁰⁰ In the city, the militia patrols the air in modified jellyfish.⁹⁰¹ Even sharks are not safe:

On the coast hundreds of miles away (Judah said) an ictineo, one of New Crobuzon’s experimental ichthyscaphoi, must have come to land. A behemoth fish come out of the ocean crawling on fins that became leg-stubs that stamped forward until the stumpy limb-things shattered under their own weight and the enormous Remade fish-thing lay down and shuddered. [...] The fish-ship’s mouth (Judah said) must have opened with a grind of industry, anchored by chains, drawbridge-style, as the flange of lower jaw descended and the men of the New Crobuzon militia emerged, bringing their weapons, and coming for the Council.⁹⁰²

When the events of the novel are over, when Iron Council has returned to New Crobuzon to find the rebellion crushed, and been frozen in time as an inspirational monument, a friend tells Cutter about the aftermath: “Bodies by walls, every one of them ‘resisting,’ they said, while they were taken away. Resisting by tripping, or asking a moment’s rest, or spitting, resisting by not coming fast enough when they were told.”⁹⁰³

Even so, the individuals in the militia are not depicted as bad people. Around a campfire, Cutter tells the story of discovering a lover was a militiaman. Although same-sex partnerships are illegal in New Crobuzon, the militiaman never arrested him, and they

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid. 46.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid. 313.

⁹⁰² Ibid. 417.

⁹⁰³ Ibid. 558.

spent a single perfect night together.⁹⁰⁴ But the militia do not operate as individuals in these novels; they represent an unjust system, and many of Miéville's protagonists have few qualms about killing them, injuring them, or otherwise treating them as less than human. Miéville's narration shows them in pain, though⁹⁰⁵, and the author is quick to point out that his characters are not necessarily his mouthpieces, and make decisions that he does not always consider right.⁹⁰⁶

This critique of police powers does echo Miéville's politics, but there is another stroke of brilliance here, in that Miéville does not have to imagine--or tell us--how the militia, the government of the city, or the compliant citizenry justify their actions to themselves. Readers know this already. As Philip Cole has said, the harm that the militia do is rationalized by the narrative that they are punishing or preventing evil.

In the books set on Earth, Miéville does not depict policing authorities as refugee-murdering, dissident-massacring, whale-shark-mutilating monsters, but they are nevertheless ambivalent, often ominous figures. In *Kraken*, the person trying to end the world turns out to be a consultant working with the police. Kath Collingswood, also of the cult squad, has a past as something of a schoolyard bully⁹⁰⁷, and indeed the cult squad itself is good at finding things out just a shade too late to be of any use. In *The City & the City*, Tyador Borlú is a police officer himself, but he is critical of his fellow officers' techniques, and finds that as an outsider, he does not trust Ul Qoma's police.⁹⁰⁸ As mentioned, the cities' most strictly enforced rules have nothing to do with preventing harm to people.

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid. 141.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid. 86.

⁹⁰⁶ Miéville, "Reveling in Genre" 365.

⁹⁰⁷ Miéville, *Kraken* 69.

⁹⁰⁸ Miéville, *The City & the City* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009) 204.

In *Un Lun Dun*, at one point the protagonist Deeba is placed under arrest by the London Metropolitan Police⁹⁰⁹--Special Constabulary for UnLondon Monitoring⁹¹⁰, or for those who pay attention to acronyms, SCUM. The police are there in the company and at the behest of Mr. Murgatroyd, who works for the Minister of the Environment⁹¹¹ and who, after betraying Deeba, had been left tied up.⁹¹² While Officer Sound, promises to protect Deeba⁹¹³, the other, Officer Churl, says, "Were you terrified, Murgatroyd? [...] There you go, girl: you're a terrorist. You make me twitchy, and under Article Forty-one of the 2000 Terrorism Bill, that's all I need. Time for some reasonable force, I think."⁹¹⁴ As Sound reminds Deeba that her family must be worried about her, Churl adds, "Those other three enemies of the state resident at your address. Cause any trouble, I'm going to enjoy ensuring their arrest and detention."⁹¹⁵ Miéville makes these police officers a special branch who are working with the Minister of the Environment and therefore complicit with the Smog--it would be a trifle irresponsible of a children's book to present all police officers in this light --but they do use scare tactics, threaten Deeba's family, and invoke terrorism in a situation where it is clearly unjust; and even the more sympathetic officer, despite his comparative friendliness and gentleness, is in league with the Smog.

His critique of policing notwithstanding, in all of Miéville's books--at least the ones in this study--government itself is not inherently destructive, but alliances between government and commercial interests, including criminal enterprises, are. In *Perdido Street Station*, the government hopes to make money, and relieve itself of an expensive and

⁹⁰⁹ Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* 359.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid. 360.

⁹¹¹ Ibid. 207.

⁹¹² Ibid. 316.

⁹¹³ Ibid. 361.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid. 361.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid. 362.

dangerous burden, by selling the slake moths to Mr. Motley's crime syndicate. In *The Scar*, the grindylow attack Armada because New Crobuzon is making a grab for the Gengris, their home, much in the same way that the Lovers, part of Armada's power structure, steer the floating city towards the Scar to make a grab for possibility energy. In *Iron Council*, the war with Tesh, which uses conscripted soldiers, kills and maims thousands, and nearly leads to the destruction of the city, is a war for trade routes⁹¹⁶, "territories and commodity chains, for theories, they said."⁹¹⁷ Weather Wrightby's railway uses Remade slaves, and one of the supervisors indicates that the corporation has pressured New Crobuzon to remake people to certain specifications.⁹¹⁸ In *Un Lun Dun*, the Smog is aided both by UnLondon's captains of industry, called the Concern, who "say there's business they want to do, factories and the like, that'll lead to more smoke and more emissions, so it makes sense to work *with* the Smog"⁹¹⁹, and by London's Minister of the Environment, who is cleaning London air by sending the pollution into UnLondon. In *The City and the City*, Mahalia Geary's killer is working for the Research and Development wing of an international company called Sear and Core, which also employs members of Beszel's government who assist in covering up the murder. In *Kraken*, the police ignore a brutal beating by strikebreakers because they are under orders from the crime boss Tattoo.⁹²⁰

Unlike Lackey's books, where sexism and blood sacrifice are signifiers, the smoke to mythical evil's fire, Miéville's work argues that alliances between government and the commercial world are themselves morally wrong. When government aligns itself with

⁹¹⁶ Miéville, *Iron Council* 79.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid. 331.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid. 221.

⁹¹⁹ Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* 318.

⁹²⁰ Ibid. 168-170.

entities that exist to make a profit, it becomes oppressive, placing profit above the needs of its citizens.

Very often, governments that have chosen this path continue to act with the consent of their citizens. Miéville's work explores the manufacture of that consent, and shows it leading to results that those who give their consent would not support. Like Lackey, Miéville often tells the stories of ordinary people who are roped into the service of destructive powers. However, where Lackey depicts such characters as being infected by that contact--as behaving callously, and developing contempt for the marginalized--Miéville shows how characters can unwittingly, with the best of intentions, act on behalf of antagonists, of whom they themselves are often--but not always--deeply critical. In *Perdido Street Station*, Isaac's lab partner, David, informs the New Crobuzon militia about Isaac's slake moth, hoping that the militia can control what his friends plainly cannot,⁹²¹ and this leads to an armed raid on the laboratory. In *Iron Council*, Ori finds that Spiral Jacobs has used him to launch an apocalyptic Teshi spell.⁹²² In *Un Lun Dun*, the Propheser Mortar thinks he is working with Benjamin Unstible to defeat the Smog⁹²³, when in actuality, Unstible has been murdered and his dead body possessed by the Smog.⁹²⁴ And in the same novel, treated Smog-proof umbrellas are a short-term solution to the problem the Smog poses that give UnLondoners the illusion of control. Armed with the umbrellas, they go about their daily lives, making small concessions to the Smog, so that by the time they realize they are still in danger, the Smog has grown much more powerful.⁹²⁵

⁹²¹ Miéville, *Perdido Street Station* 298-300.

⁹²² Miéville, *Iron Council* 461.

⁹²³ Miéville, *Un Lun Dun* 233.

⁹²⁴ Ibid. 203.

⁹²⁵ Ibid. 433-434.

The most sustained meditation on this theme is *The Scar*. Bellis Coldwine tries repeatedly to do the right thing, the best thing, with the information that she is given, only to find out that she has been manipulated by other forces. Silas Fennec convinces her that she must get a message to New Crobuzon to prevent its destruction, but what he sends is a message leading New Crobuzon to Armada. Racked with guilt about the many deaths this causes, and enraged at Fennec for his betrayal, Coldwine tells the truth to Uther Doul, and endures a flogging, and his contempt at her for being “stupid.”⁹²⁶ Much later, Coldwine realizes that Doul has been using her too: while he never actually told her anything that could be called treasonous, he gave her just enough information for her to piece things together on her own, expecting her to take her conclusions back to Fennec so that he would foment a rebellion. When Fennec is revealed as an enemy of the state for entirely different reasons, Doul finds another way: with a gesture at a key moment, he reminds Coldwine of a listening post that lets her and a more credible friend eavesdrop on the leadership’s decision-making at a key moment.

Although Doul is convincing when he berates Coldwine for passing on Fennec’s message to New Crobuzon, any moral weight that that betrayal, or his anger, might have had is invalidated: all three times that she acts, Coldwine uses the information she has been given to choose one set of loyalties over another with the aim of preventing thousands of needless deaths. In one case she unwittingly *causes* deaths; in another she is simply unsuccessful and nothing changes; and in the final case, she succeeds in causing a mutiny that turns Armada around and takes it back to safer waters. But while the result changes, Coldwine’s intent, and the decisions she is being asked to make, do not. As responsible as

⁹²⁶ Miéville, *The Scar* 453.

she is for her own decisions, in an environment where the facts are unclear and skilled manipulators operate, there is nothing Coldwine can have learned from Fennec's betrayal that will help her make wiser and better decisions in the future.

But even Fennec is not *bad*. Just as the grindylow look like Lovecraftian monsters from the depths from one angle, Fennec's blend of explorer and secret agent might look heroic from other angles. Miéville says, "[...] I wanted him to be quite cool[...]"⁹²⁷ He is a James Bond or a Brock Samson, this time seen through the eyes of the people he has wronged.

A final facet of culpable wrongdoing--perhaps the most interesting--in Mieville's cosmology is self-deception. In both *Kraken* and *The City & The City*, the principal antagonists are intelligent men who have abandoned flawed belief systems, but are willing to act immorally in order to make them more true. In *The City & The City*, David Bowden is an academic whose first book, which argued for the existence of Orciny, has been thoroughly discredited. His academic career has been ruined, and he himself is marked as a crackpot, even though he himself no longer believes the book's conclusions. He convinces Mahalia Geary to smuggle artifacts out of an archaeological dig for his industry bosses by convincing her that Orciny is real, and the rightful owner of those artifacts. He kills her when she discovers that she has been used--even though, detective Tyador Borlú posits, she was not angry with him, and thought he had been duped as much as she had; that she outsmarted him, puncturing his fantasy a second time, was enough provocation:

'But it was your idea, and it was never about the money.

⁹²⁷ Miéville, "Reveling in Genre" 369.

‘It was because you missed Orciny. A way to have it both ways. Yes, sure you were wrong about Orciny, but you could make it so you were right, too. [...]

‘You told Mahalia she was the only one you’d tell the truth. That when you turned your back on your book, that was just you playing politics? Or did you tell her it was cowardice? That would be pretty winning. I bet you did that. [...] “It’s my shame, Mahalia, the pressure was too much. You’re braver than me, keep on; you’re so close, you’ll find it...” Your sh** messed up your whole career, and you can’t have that time back. So the next best thing, make it have been true all along. I’m sure the money was nice--can’t tell me they didn’t pay--and Buric had his reasons and Sear and Core had theirs, and the [nationalists]’ll do for anyone with a way with words and a buck. But it was *Orciny* that was the point for you, right?⁹²⁸

Arguably, in a society that clings so desperately to the imaginary line drawn across the city, it is not surprising that a man would kill for his own personal fiction.

In *Kraken*, Patrick Vardy is a psychology professor who acts as a consultant to the cult squad. Early on, the permanent members of the cult squad explain him to Billy:

‘Man of faith,’ Baron said. ‘Grew up one of your ultra-born-again. Creationist, literalist. His dad was an elder. He was in it for years. Lost his faith but not his interest, lucky for us, and not his nous, neither. Every group we look at, he gets it like a convert’--Baron thumped his chest--‘because for a moment or two, he *is*.’

⁹²⁸ Miéville, *The City & The City* 299-300.

‘It’s more than that,’ Collingswood said. ‘He don’t just get it,’ she said. She grinned smoke at Billy. She put her hand to her lips, as if she were whispering, though she was not. ‘He *misses* it. He’s miserable. He didn’t used to have to put up with none of this random reality [stuff]. He’s p***ed off with the world for being all godless and pointless, get me? He’d go back to his old faith tomorrow if he could. But he’s too smart now. [...] He knows religion is bollocks,’ Collingswood said. ‘He just wishes he didn’t. That’s why he understands the nutters. That’s why he hunts them. He misses pure faith. He’s jealous.’⁹²⁹

Vardy helps in their efforts to retrieve the *Architeuthis* specimen around which an apocalypse seems to be gathering... but he is the means by which it gathers. *Architeuthis* shares a room with bottled specimens from Darwin’s *Beagle* voyage, Vardy means to use time-fire to burn these specimens out of ever having existed:

This was a fiery rebooting. Uploading new worldware. [...]

Vardy did not want to eradicate the idea of evolution: he wanted to rewind the fact of it. And with evolution--that key, that wedge, that wellspring--would all those other things follow, the drably vulgar contingent weak godlessness that had absolutely nothing going for it at all except, infuriatingly, its truth.

And he was persuaded, and was trying to persuade the city and history, that it was in these contemplated specimens, these fading animals in their antique preserve, that evolution had come to be. What would evolution be if humans had

⁹²⁹ Miéville, China. *Kraken* 54-55.

not noticed it? Nothing. Not even a detail. In seeing it, Darwin had made it be, and always have been. These *Beagle* things were bloated.

Vardy would burn them into un-having-been-ness, unwind the threads that Darwin had woven, eradicate the facts. This was Vardy's strategy to help his own unborn god, the stern and loving literalist god he had read in texts. He could not make it win--the battle was lost--but he might make it *have won*. Burn evolution until it never was and the rebooted universe and the people in it might be, instead, created, as it and they should have been.⁹³⁰

Both Bowen and Vardy are highly intelligent people, academics, rigorous enough to know that they are wrong; but the fictions that they are wrong about are still attractive enough to kill for. This functions both as a source of horror, and an acknowledgement of the way the world works: one can prove oneself intellectually, only to discover that the beliefs one disproves were not held for intellectual reasons. Even acknowledged fictions can be destructive.

In Miéville's books, the very few characters marked as essentially evil are cartoonish in comparison to the destructive powers of systemic injustice. Pollution may be one of the side effects, but systemic injustice is not so much tempting or polluting as totalizing and inexorable, and as such, neither is it palpable; even characters critical of systemic injustice are not always aware when their efforts further it. It is disembodied, in that its agents are ordinary people who often act for what they see as the greater good, and no single one of them can be held entirely responsible for the actions of the system, although some of them

⁹³⁰ Miéville, *Kraken* 497-498.

resist more than others. It is dehumanizing, or rather, depersonizing, fostering fear and discord. It is not *viciously* competitive, but it sets well-meaning people with different interests against each other. In short, systemic injustice in Miéville's work differs from Tolkienesque evil in many respects, but it does many of the same things that Tolkienesque evil does, and yet does not require any kind of malice to work--just blind self-interest and a willingness to trust authorities. The solution is not a slaughter of faceless hordes culminating in the defeat of a dark lord, but the abolition of the very concept of faceless hordes and dark lords, the acknowledgement of one's own complicity, and rigorous questioning of everything, including the people, viewpoints, and practices that are denounced as evil.

Conclusions

Of all the bodies of work in this study, Miéville's is perhaps the most self-reflexive, arguably because he is standing very carefully on the shoulders of giants, but also because Miéville consciously interrogates and subverts high fantasy tropes that place the telling of a satisfying story at odds with what is known about the world, and because his work makes a narrative commitment to erasing no one and forgetting no one, vastly expanding the number of stories and the *kinds* of stories that he is able to tell.

An interesting pattern emerges in Miéville's fiction. New Crobuzon, Iron Council, Armada, Beszel, and Ul Qoma--all of his invented cities, in other words--are city-states. Although Miéville concerns himself a great deal with power structures, governance, and economic justice, none of the works studied address one of the more pressing problems

that cities face, namely, how to share resources with other communities in the same jurisdiction.

Miéville's work does not make use of the concept of evil. He rather exposes some of the mechanisms of oppression, shows how even well-meaning characters can become complicit in them, and suggests patterns of behaviour that resist and challenge injustice. These patterns include listening respectfully to people, considering one's own position in relation to others, being aware of power structures and how one's own actions reinforce or challenge them, empowering people to decide their own futures, considering no one expendable (regardless of the perceived worthiness of the cause), and continuously questioning and critiquing the narratives that dictate how things "should" go. In this instance, there is nothing to be gained by calling anything or anyone evil, and in fact he shows how such handy dichotomous thinking is itself a tool of oppression.

Miéville engages with the concept of mythical evil playfully, but the real wrong in his fiction is the power structures that permit systemic injustice, and the marriage of commerce and government--sources of antagonism that are not at all dependent on the fantastic, but that in fantasy universes take on new shapes. In Miéville's hands those new shapes work to foreground issues that face readers--race relations, environmental issues, labour issues, policing, borders--while telling compelling stories.

While I do not share the perspective that Miéville's fiction represents the birth of an entirely new kind of fantasy, his rigour, his careful attention to representation, and his approach to ethics have the potential to cause a substantial shift in fantasy's fuzzy set.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

One of the early uses of cities in the urban fantasy genre is juxtaposition of the modern urban environment and the magical, which at the time had strong associations with the pastoral. Over time, however, as the genre develops, the juxtapositional quality wears off. Authors such as Lackey and de Lint take narrative advantage of the city's potential for danger, even as they laud its culture and diversity and champion the things that will make it less dangerous. Links can be drawn between this progression and the drive to revitalize cities in the 1990s. Once the effects of juxtaposition wore off, and the legitimacy of cities as a site for magic and--perhaps more importantly--a worthy habitat for human beings no longer had to be argued for, it settled in as a legitimate backdrop for fantasy stories, allowing authors to treat the urban environment more casually.

De Lint's use of the city attempts to reclaim the city for magic, and to impart values that make cities more livable. In his earliest work, this effort takes the form of deriving models from a rural past; later, he finds ways to argue that the urban landscape itself can be a source of wonder. For Lackey, on the other hand, cities are primarily sites of both danger and absurd juxtaposition.

Armstrong is writing at a time when the city as a setting for fantasy does not have to be argued for, and is simply an environment in which action takes place; moreover, she writes from the perspective of characters whose bodily needs or social status make them more comfortable in cities. Cities, therefore, are part of the backdrop of her work, but are primarily peripheral.

Miéville is the only European author featured in the study, and the cities in which his work is set--even the otherworldly ones--are quintessentially Old World cities, ancient and multifaceted, the dense, sprawling, ancient megalopolis that is never pretty but often sublime. Miéville's country of origin, as Reentstjerna points out, has a history of regarding the urban environment as a source of evil, ugliness, and corruption, so his celebration of the city is in part a reclamation effort of sorts. However, unlike the North American novels that reclaim the city by focusing on the vibrant culture of downtown areas, Miéville's work celebrates the city as is, as a flawed totality full of people who live their lives, sometimes ingeniously, in whatever environment they have to work with.⁹³¹

The relocation of magic to an urban setting creates interesting tensions in the work of the earlier authors. For de Lint and Lackey, there are areas of friction between what is morally right in a mundane setting and what is appropriate in a world of magic, particularly as set out by high fantasy. De Lint has his characters wrestle with this: Christiana Tree with killing the Leviathan; Imogene Yeck more indirectly, with the implications of an act that "felt right" making the *anamithim* mortal. Lackey, on the other hand, relies on the narrative itself to work out the tension, with varying degrees of success: in *The Wizard of London*, the Warriors of the Light are an attempt to cloak moral rightness in the trappings appropriate to fantasy. In the same book, Lackey chooses a morally preferable resolution to the conflict over a narratively appropriate one, and the result is disappointing. Both Lackey and de Lint, early entrants into the urban fantasy subgenre, would have had their expectations of

⁹³¹ Miéville, "Reveling in Genre," 364. "The point about dialectics is that the postmodern fascination with hybridity and miscegenation too often blurs into a fetishistic and sometimes quite self-indulgent *celebration* of marginality *for its own sake*. Obviously, the best stuff doesn't do this, but you see it, for example, in a lot of the 'subaltern studies' canon. Now, dialectics are centrally important to me, as they focus on much the same stuff--blurred interstices, gray areas, hard cases--but *as part of a social and historical totality*. The conception of totality is absolutely central to my political and theoretical life."

the conventions surrounding magic formed by fantasy and folklore, rather than other urban fantasy. Miéville, the most recent of the four authors, also engages with the issue, in *Un Lun Dun* in particular. However, rather than attempting to harmonize or talk through the two, he chooses to subvert the very idea of appropriateness, making those who insist upon it major obstacles to the success of Deeba's quest. Armstrong also subverts tradition, but the genre she talks back to is not fantasy, but horror. This may account for the curious flattening in her work, whereby everything is reduced to a human scale. Her novels successfully argue that traditional figures of horror are not in fact horrific, but in the genre that she has chosen to articulate these sentiments, the loss reads as a loss of wonder.

Just as the engagement with genre conventions changes, so does the meaning of evil. Primarily, evil is for the protagonists to fight--to grow into their powers, to find a new set of responsibilities, to explore previously unexamined aspects of their lives, their communities, and their relationships with their fellow creatures. For Lackey, whose work registers a certain amount of comfort with and support for existing structures and systems both real and fictional, this is a fairly simple transaction. For Miéville, de Lint, and Armstrong, however, finding and naming the wrong that is being done often involves laying bare the structures of the protagonist's world and finding out how things *really* work, the better to put things right.

In high fantasy, these structures are often grounded in myth. They are simple and widely known, and it is these structures that Lackey seems to be carrying forward into our world, depending on the reader's familiarity with the genre to do some of the work of explaining, and on the reader's fears to eliminate the need for other explanations. For the other authors, creating fantastic structures that can be credibly interwoven with those in

this world, or in a plausible otherworld city such as New Crobuzon, abnegates the concept of pure evil.

Another function of mythical evil for de Lint, Lackey, and Armstrong, is the use of antagonist characters to enact vengeance that would be unacceptable coming from the protagonists. Fay Harper's robbery of the hypocritical Christian couple is one example. Another is Pinky Miller's and Raylene Carter's revenge on the teacher who got Pinky's underage cousin pregnant: they steal drugs from a biker gang, plant them in the teacher's home, and telephone the bikers with a tip.⁹³² These acts are emotionally satisfying, but they are rejected by the dominant morality of the text.

The final and perhaps most foregrounded function of mythical evil in these texts, of course, is to point to moral evil, to use the hero's dragon to critique something in the real world, to show that things like abuse or inequality or irresponsibility create--or at the very least, enable--monsters. To this end, all four authors devote varying amounts of time and energy to the exploration of the reasons behind behaviour that receives the label "evil." Even when the reasons include the existence of elemental evil, it is never the sole cause of suffering. Other causes include greed, vengeance, inequality, competing interests, xenophobia, and even ostensibly benign motives that fail to recognize the personhood of others, or that recognize their personhood but consider the circumstances too dire to act otherwise.

All four authors, regardless of their views on elemental evil, recognize and deplore bullying⁹³³, sadism, and the willingness to do harm to consolidate power or resources. For

⁹³² De Lint, *Onion Girl* 102-103.

⁹³³ This was called "thuggishness" in a previous draft, but in the intervening years the word "thug" has taken on increasingly racialized connotations.

de Lint, this bullying is not tightly aligned with the forces that furnish antagonism in his novels, but these forces are often a response to or an employer of bullies. The murderous Gannon and his men, who break into Tamson House, work for corporate powerhouse Hugh Walters; Del Carter warped and twisted Raylene Carter; bullying makes Adrian willing to sacrifice the bullies to the anamithim; the Bogan Boys act at the behest of a wronged god. For Lackey, on the other hand, bullying is often a tool of elemental evil: being selfish and unintelligent makes people ripe for takeover or exploitation by evil forces. For Armstrong, bullying shades into evil. And for Miéville, bullies are those such as Mr. Motley, Goss and Subby, or Tattoo and Grisamentum, who abuse and exploit existing power structures for personal gain. In all cases, however, bullying is not coterminous with the principal source of antagonism. Although bullies seem to enjoy doing harm, they are not intelligent or transgressive enough, and their powers are too limited, for them to be the principal antagonists.

Indeed, it is possible to view their representations of bullying as a critique of machismo. De Lint writes of Gathen Redshanks, one of the young bogans running with Dan Cockle's Bogan Boys:

He liked being one of Big Dan's Bogan Boys, liked the way the other fairies and even the smaller green-bree spirits gave them a wide berth when the gang went swaggering about town, liked the way they could take what they wanted from pretty much anyone without argument. They were seen as hard men now, tall in the eyes

of the fearful. When they showed up at a market or a revel, people were wary of them, careful not to give offense.⁹³⁴

That bullies are always peripheral, and not principal antagonists, could simply be a matter of genre. We know what bullies are like; detailing someone's struggles against them is not the stuff of fantasy. If they are meant to be evil, then they are a deflation and subversion of Tolkienesque evil--narrow and avaricious, orcs rather than Sauron himself, although it is useful to ask what mundane forces act upon people to make them orcish. Additionally and crucially, a novel in which the hero fights only bullies is ethically, politically, and most importantly, mythopoetically bereft.

All of the authors in this study have grappled with the question of why ordinary people do, or throw their support behind, terrible things *when they know these things are wrong*. Although Lackey in particular seems willing to attribute some of it to sheer perversity, all four authors see the roots of such behaviour in a narrow view of the world that ignores the interests of others. Sometimes, particularly when the harm is done to those in close proximity, this behaviour is rooted in woundedness--from bullying, abuse, or systemic injustice. Other times--particularly for Miéville and Armstrong, and particularly when the actors are at one remove from their victims--the behaviour is simply participation in a system that not only disenfranchises others to the benefit of the participants, but then makes the disenfranchised invisible or paints them as deserving of their lower status.

⁹³⁴ De Lint, *Widdershins* 140.

It is worth noting that the work of the two male authors does not express an explicit belief in essential evil, while the work of the two female authors does. It is possible that this is purely coincidence, an artefact of the small sample size. But if it is not, why would women be more likely than men to subscribe to a belief in absolute evil? It may have to do with the relationship that women tend to be socialized to have to their surroundings, the expectation that one will curb one's behaviour in response to the danger posed by bad people. However, portrayals of evil are dictated not just about what one fears, but what and how one wants the hero to fight. It is only relatively recently that physical prowess has been a credible part of a fantasy heroine's repertoire, but for physical conflict to be seen as just, it must happen with someone who deserves to be beaten up. If fantasy problematizes the idea that membership in a certain country or species is reason enough, then essential evil is one of the tools left available to authors.

Another difference between the male authors and the female authors is their characters' relationship to the mundane world. In Miéville's and de Lint's work, magic is part of the fabric of the world, and theoretically accessible to all. Although de Lint makes an effort to modify this in his later work, he still suggests that whatever one's ability to *use* magic, the ability to engage with it, to experience it, to be enriched by it, is still available.

In Lackey's and Armstrong's books, on the other hand, the boundary between magical citizens and mundane ones is less permeable. When mundane humans experience contact with the magical world--either when the magical world intrudes on their own, as when Lady Cordelia adopts orphans for sacrifice, or Leah O'Donnell kills humans to lure Savannah Levine; or when mundane humans attempt to use magic themselves, as when Threshold Labs finds a way to give humans psychic powers, or humans kidnap

supernaturals in *Stolen*; or Fafnir, Master of Treasure and May Donovan command cults hungry for a taste of magic--the results are usually horrific.

It seems strange that the women authors in this study would be the ones to depict a biologically mandated hierarchy in which some people are inherently more powerful than others, with the others needing to be protected, kept out of certain spaces, and kept in their proper places. On the other hand, it is possible to view this choice as a function of the depiction of evil. If essential evil exists, and it can use magic, then the only responsible solution is to leave the fighting to the heroes, and keep ordinary human beings as far away from it as possible. In other words, the nature of the threat being fought, and the way the fighting is done, pave the way for a hierarchical power structure that is portrayed as natural.

In keeping with this, both Armstrong and Lackey imagine a universe that dispenses some form of justice. A universe in which elemental or essential evil exists, and some characters are naturally stronger than others, virtually demands an equally powerful elemental good to strike a balance. For Lackey, it does this through incorruptible agents; for Armstrong, it does so through the Fates, who are themselves incorruptible, but not perfect or all-powerful. At variance with Lackey's universe, there is no perfect system, and even magically reinforced justice gets it wrong sometimes. The effect of this is that while evil can be created by systemic injustice, it can also take advantage of it, and ally itself with power structures.

De Lint, too, has superhuman characters who dispense supernatural justice, such as Nokomis and her sisters. However, without elemental or essential evil as a polarizing factor, the impression is not one of a personalized ordering principle of the universe, but

rather than that of a person with more resources helping those with fewer--an example that readers can emulate without extraordinary powers or knowledge. Miéville employs this dynamic as well, but in the more grotesque figures of the *Architeuthis* and the Weaver, whose gifts are often of ambiguous benefit.

In the work of all four authors, it is also possible to see the progression in the treatment of the Other. With both Lackey and de Lint, benign magical others start out as radically Other, opaque, positively valued but exotic. But the authors cannot sustain that kind of opacity over the course of several novels, so the Others become better developed, more fully realized. Armstrong's protagonists are magical beings who are fully credible as human women. As Others go, they are reasonably mundane, but this makes them credible as self. Miéville takes the portrayal of the other a step further, imagining the radically Other and then working backward, giving it a complex background and plausible motivations, but never allowing characters, or readers, to impose their own experiences and assumptions onto it.

I have mentioned that the treatment of non-human people has some bearing on a text's engagement with the issue of ethnicity and "race" relations. Miéville in particular has indicated in interviews a self-conscious, self-reflexive effort to make his portrayal of xenians in *Bas-Lag* a faithful reflection of the interplay between race, culture, and multiculturalism. Miéville invents his own nonhuman creatures, free of our cultural baggage, but freighted with their own; and he gives them a recognizable experience of marginality, informed by academic work on oppression. Nicholas Birns points out:

There is much more material interaction in the to-and-fro of everyday life among khepri, cacti, humans, and Remade than among elves, dwarves, and hobbits in Tolkien, but far less chance that the multiple races could enter a grand coalition against 'Evil.' Not only a post-liberal idea of multiculturalism informs Miéville's perspective here, but also recent discussions of animal rights and consciousness. The novels characterize the khepri, garuda and animate cacti not just as mythical creatures but as 'animals' in the way that humanity has conventionally defined the 'animal,' drawing a parallel between the kind of perceived gap that historically existed between humanity and animals in our world with the different species's awareness of each other in Bas-Lag. Even while the physical reality of their interpenetration compels them to work together, the process is tortuous, tenuous, and segregated in the highly stratified and ghettoized society of New Crobuzon.⁹³⁵

In virtually any other context, the prospect of combining conversations about multiculturalism and animal rights would be deeply troubling. However, since fantasy as a genre has a history of discussing race in terms of biological difference, positing sentient species with different body forms, ability levels, habitats, and psychologies, it is a connection worth thoughtfully and carefully pursuing. The presence of other intelligent and possibly sentient species on Earth--gorillas, chimpanzees, and dolphins--necessitates a conversation about personhood among nonhumans. Fantasy may well be one of the best places for this conversation to happen. Of course, this has little bearing on antagonism in

⁹³⁵ Nicholas Birns, "From Cacotopias to Railroads: Rebellion and the Shaping of the Normal in the Bas-Lag Universe," *Extrapolation* 50:2 (2009): 203.

Miéville's work, except to expose race-based scapegoating and stereotyping as red herrings that foster discord between characters and divert them from the real fight.

In the work of other authors, however, it is interesting to see how depictions of non-human people progress hand in hand with depictions of evil. De Lint, Lackey, and Armstrong all seem to step back from portrayals of elemental evil, even as they modify their portrayals of non-human people. De Lint's Mal'ek'a and monolithic Otherworld populated only by people from First Nations mythology have given way to more complex and troubled antagonists, and a rich and varied group of magical people with their own affiliations, agendas, and prejudices. The Manitou and the Sidhe, once conflated, have become differentiated, and acquire their own factions, backgrounds, histories, and relationships, in apparent recognition of the genuine difference between the groups to whom these mythologies are attributed. De Lint's work is still not without its problems, but his trajectory, over the course of his career, has been towards better and more sensitive representation.

Armstrong examines creatures who have previously been objects of horror, giving them lives and families and anxieties that are often different from human anxieties, but still recognizable and capable of engendering sympathy. As her work progresses, she shows that structures and actions that look evil from one angle are necessary and sensible from another--and vice versa. Armstrong's mutts and sorcerers are no longer categorically villains, just as no other supernaturals are any *one* thing.

Even Lackey, who is more conservative than the others, and arguably clings most strongly to the idea of essential evil, slots elves into a multicultural society, but more importantly, she undermines her work's carefully cultivated paranoia by raising the

possibility that powerful inhuman infiltrators can be not only benign but necessary; and has modified her depictions of the Unseleighe Sidhe so that they are no longer a collection of species with an unreasoning hatred for human beings, but something more like a political group, some of whom have legitimate grievances against humans, some of whom are carnivores for whom humans are a source of sustenance, and some of whom are simply innocent children. Although Lackey and Armstrong do not abandon essential evil altogether, both are compelled to keep pushing it back: the more fully they realize their characters, and the more solidly they fit them into a world recognizable as our own, the less apt the label “evil” really is.

Although it is tempting to say that as authors grow increasingly concerned about the representation of parahumans in their work, they also grow increasingly critical of systems, this would not be accurate. De Lint, by and large, does not address the question of systems and how well they serve the characters in his books, although the decision to locate those characters on the margins of mainstream society--which, as I said in Chapter 4, is typical of urban fantasy--is itself telling.

Lackey, who began by making a similar decision, has since compartmentalized government employees into good firefighters and police officers and bad federal agents. Her increasing valorization of figures such as knights, police officers, and soldiers, as well as institutions such as highly regimented schools, suggests that over time she has become less critical of systems--or perhaps simply more critical of those who are critical of systems, seeing the critique as an excuse for laziness or laxity, if not an invitation to outright danger. A charitable interpretation would suggest that she evaluates systems based on their intended function, and that however well or ill they carry that out, she is sympathetic to the

individuals who work as part of them. The fictional systems she herself creates to maintain order have built in cosmically mandated fail-safes as part of an acknowledgement that without these they can go terribly wrong. At the same time, her participation in and endorsement of narratives that justify and glorify hypervigilance as a way to experience true authenticity has real-world consequences for the systems that she endorses, for the people ruled by those systems, and for the people marked as enemies.

Armstrong, as I mentioned, is deeply ambivalent about systems, and Miéville stops just short of antipathy towards them. This is perhaps partly attributable to cultural change: the bulk of these authors' output has occurred in times of political and economic uncertainty (and they are both writing in countries that often see themselves as foils for the American system). Moreover, they are, as I mentioned, writing *back* to now-established genres, and inherent in this is a certain degree of critique.

Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey write that "stories people tell about themselves and their lives both constitute and interpret those lives; the stories describe the work as it is lived and understood by the storyteller."⁹³⁶ It is safe to assume that the overwhelming majority of fantasy readers know the difference between fact and fiction.⁹³⁷ At the very least, if they act as though there are truly fairies at the bottom of the garden, it is an aesthetic (and perhaps ethical) choice rather than an uncritical reaction to perceived material reality. At the same time, we know that many works of fantasy tell us something about the world, about what is good, what is valuable. A fantasy novel that encouraged no

⁹³⁶ Patricia Ewick and Susan S. Silbey, "Subversive Stories and Hegemonic Tales: Toward a Sociology of Narrative," *Law & Society Review* 29:2 (1995), 198.

⁹³⁷ In a bus station in Liverpool, an Australian traveller who I'd just told about my research on Tolkien asked me, "Do you actually believe this stuff?" I was at a loss to answer him.

connection whatsoever between its contents and the life of the world would be unsatisfying, if not unreadable.

Ewick and Silbey add,

Constituent and distinctive features of narratives make them particularly potent forms of social control and ideological penetration and homogenization. In part, their potency derives from the fact that narratives put 'forth powerful and persuasive truth claims--claims about appropriate behaviour and values--that are shielded from testing or debate (Witten 1993: 105⁹³⁸). Performative features of narrative such as repetition, vivid concrete details, particularity of characters, and coherence of plot silence epistemological challenges and often generate emotional identification and commitment. Because narratives make implicit rather than explicit claims regarding causality and truth as they are dramatized in particular events regarding specific characters, stories elude challenges, testing, or debate.⁹³⁹

A world of simple good and evil is satisfying and cathartic. It releases frustration by creating a hero with whom the reader can identify, and setting that person against a source of suffering and anxiety that is tangible, simple, and deserving of an emotionally satisfying punishment. But even if we know that the particulars are not true, sometimes the overall patterns are deeply appealing. Gregory Desilet's arguments about the perniciousness of the melodramatic form itself are a bit too strong to be taken seriously, but Patrick B. Sharp, in his article "From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland," points out that in the latter

⁹³⁸ [Marsha Witten, "Narrative and the Culture of Obedience in the Workplace," *Mumbo* 1993.]

⁹³⁹ Ewick and Silbey, 214.

nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, a popular fiction genre in English-speaking countries was the Yellow Peril story, in which a white hero--such as Buck Rogers or Nayland Smith--uses superior Western technology to defeat hordes of soulless invaders from a monolithic "Orient."⁹⁴⁰ This narrative both reflected and no doubt influenced and legitimized racism against Asian immigrants, and gave Americans a narrative to help them make sense of the Pearl Harbor attack.⁹⁴¹ More chillingly, when America dropped nuclear bombs on Japan, the co-pilot of the *Enola Gay* said, "[W]hat we saw made us feel that we were Buck Rogers twenty-fifth-century warriors."⁹⁴²

In short, stories are incredibly powerful tools for interpreting the world and for providing patterns for our own lives, and events such as the nuclear bombing of Japan and the Satanic Panic prove that a sufficiently compelling story--and more to the point, a depiction of evil that sufficiently taps into its own culture's deepest anxieties--can bend the world around it. Authors, with the power to reorder the world to their specifications, can use fantasy to reinforce and encourage, or complicate and challenge, certain approaches to the world.

In Tolkien's time, it was very much in keeping with his purpose to envision an essential evil that cherished mechanical things over people, that embraced modernity and cut down trees. Two World Wars could not help but inform his work, but during his lifetime, he adamantly resisted any attempts to equate Sauron with Germany or the Axis powers. Fault and virtue, he insisted, had been on both sides in the wars. But Tolkien had

⁹⁴⁰ Patrick B. Sharp, "From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland: John Hersey's 'Hiroshima,'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 46 (2000): 437. Or, in the case of Flash Gordon, aliens with stereotypically "Oriental" characteristics. I contend that early science fiction's portrayal of aliens has roots in the Yellow Peril genre, but that is a topic for a future project.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid. 438.

⁹⁴² William L. Laurence, *Dawn Over Zero* (New York: Knopf, 1946), 217, qtd. in Sharp, 441.

no control over the work of his many imitators. Evil for evil's sake became a staple of the genre he helped to create, and this has then been mapped onto the real world. It appears in our conversations about human rights, about immigration, and about terrorism. Indeed, when American clergyman Jim Garlow said,

I would rather die in the battle for truth than continue living under the chaos and tyranny that is coming upon us. And so some things are worth dying for, whether it's in our own emotions or in our own ambitions or whether it's actual, physical death. Some things are worth standing for and it's time for us to stand up[,]⁹⁴³

he was deploying the language of heroism, of good versus evil, to protest legislation allowing trans students to use gender-appropriate bathrooms in California schools.⁹⁴⁴

In Chapter 1, I showed that even the brightest thinkers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have a tendency to conflate fact and fiction when it comes to talking about evil. For me, this tendency is amusing and exasperating. For people who have been branded as evil in ways that have a material effect on their lives--young offenders who cannot find employment, inmates, inhabitants of countries or adherents to religions identified as being of the enemy, trans students wanting to use public washrooms without fear, to name a bare few--the matter is more urgent. "Evil" is the thing that deserves, if not punishment, at least the withholding of aid. A belief that evil is a real quality that can be possessed by human beings--or, alternatively, possess human beings--can translate, and

⁹⁴³ Qtd. in Clark, Fred. "Who Said This?" Slacktivist 2 October 2013. 1 December 2013. <<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/slacktivist/2013/10/02/who-said-this-2/>>.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid.

has often translated, to a belief that there are some human beings who, by virtue of who they are, deserve to be outside of the social order and its benefits, a belief which can result in or rationalize injustice. A belief that there can be entire groups of people, or regions of the world, or species, who are evil, permits injustice on a scale that might itself come to be regarded as evil, or at the very least, deeply harmful and wrong.

Even high fantasy, however, seems to be moving away from depictions of elemental evil, albeit at a slower rate, and in dialogue with other kinds of fantasy, as well as mainstream literature. Arguably, the entire genre is changing. My first impulse was to greet this realization with sorrow, but Gary K. Wolfe points out that the fantastic genres--science fiction, fantasy, and horror--have always been “radically unstable”⁹⁴⁵ because their genre markers change based on the time and culture that produces them:

Because of the uncertainty of [...] genre markers, the fantastic genres contain within themselves the seeds of their own dissolution, of a nascent set of postmodern rhetorical modes that would, over a period of several decades, begin to supplant not only the notion of genre itself but also the very foundations of the modernist barricades that had long been thought to insulate literary culture from the vernacular fiction of the pulps and other forms of noncanonical expression.⁹⁴⁶

He adds:

⁹⁴⁵ Gary K. Wolfe, “Evaporating Genre: Strategies of Dissolution in the Postmodern Fantastic,” *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation*, eds. Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 15.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid. 15.

The writers who contribute to the evaporation of genre, who destabilize it by undermining our expectations and appropriating materials at will, their fiction shaped by individual vision rather than the conventions of fictive traditions, are the same writers who continually revitalize genre: a healthy genre, a healthy literature, is one at risk, whose boundaries grow uncertain and whose foundations get wobbly.⁹⁴⁷

Genre critics have argued that this instability is in fact a feature of all genres. Rosalie Colie writes, “as subcultures continually melt into or are absorbed by a neighbouring culture, so did the kinds in [the Renaissance] melt into one another--often to enrich the possibilities of literature taken as system.”⁹⁴⁸ Alastair Fowler notes that “each individual kind [of literature] is continually, inexorably changing, all the time adding further extensions, new transformations; so that the terminology, even when it remains outwardly the same, changes internally without our noticing.”⁹⁴⁹

Among the factors that change genre boundaries are changes in the means of production and distribution. Major publishing companies have merged and been purchased until they are parts of huge media conglomerates, who have more responsibility to appease shareholders than to release quality fiction. This has led to a dispiriting sameness in mass market fiction, a reluctance to take risks, and an emphasis on writing series. At the same time, however, small publishers with high standards are rushing in to

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid. 27, orig. qtd. in Gordon, Joan. “Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville’s ‘Perdido Street Station,’” 463.

⁹⁴⁸ Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973), 116.

⁹⁴⁹ Fowler 141.

fill part of the vacuum. Another part of the niche has come to be occupied by self-published work, some of it being made available for free. Although self-published work has previously operated under considerable stigma, the nature of the changes to the publishing industry and the technology surrounding it have eased it considerably.

Future studies might consider taking up some of the issues I have raised, with a tighter focus and broader sample size. For example, it would be very interesting to look closely at how other fantasy authors have engaged with the Satanic Panic, or the Unseleighe Court, or economic strife; or to see what happens when the focus is shifted to newer high fantasy such as the Game of Thrones series, or to young adult fiction, or to smaller presses as opposed to mass market publishers. It has also been pointed out to me that the current dissertation alludes to but does not fully address the role that nationality plays in forming the moral landscape of a text, and this too is a possible avenue for further exploration.

This dissertation has been a sampling of the urban fantasy genre as it has been from 1984 to 2010. The genre appears now to be in the middle of a paradigm shift. As mainstream publishing companies come more and more under the influence of multimedia conglomerates more interesting in reducing costs and maximizing profit than in publishing books, they are less willing to take chances on innovative concepts, and to pursue niche markets. The vacuum they have left has been filled partially by smaller publishing companies, and partially by authors who make electronic works available cheaply or for free on the internet.

Amidst these changes in the industry, however, I see the trends that I have identified in urban fantasy continuing--with certain authors embracing nuanced depictions of motivation, complex systems, and relationships, so that the term "evil" ceases to apply,

while others cling to the idea of evil even as it slips through their fingers, unsuited to the urban environment.

Further, I believe that the Western political climate will play a role in determining what forms antagonism will take in fantasy. The framing of evil as crime is more conducive to a zero-tolerance tough-on-crime climate, and this kind of urban fantasy's fraught relationship with authoritarianism coexists comfortably with a sword-and-sorcery frontier mentality. Meanwhile Tolkienian evil is better suited to a clash-of-civilizations framing, such as the kind used to describe the West's relationship with the Soviet Union, or, particularly after 9/11, the Islamic world. And while it would be tempting to see the widespread location of evil in systems rather than individuals as signs of a shift to the left, authors from the far right of the political spectrum, such as Ted Dekker and Glenn Beck, have also written fantastic or speculative fiction that imbues power structures with satanic evil. In this, as in all other things, actuality defies quick shorthand and simple solutions.

Moreover, with the splintering of the fiction market, it may well be that different marketing strategies will favour different moral schemes. It seems likely that the small presses, which are more willing to take risks in order to produce quality innovative work, will be more amenable to moral complexity, while larger multinational-owned presses will push for the surer sale, in the form of the quick emotional high that comes from the righteous vanquishing of evil. This of course has class implications, as larger presses have more access to distribution networks, while the work of smaller presses tends to be more expensive and less readily accessible. Libraries mitigate against this possibility, as do cheap and free e-texts, but there is still the risk that a disenfranchised segment of the North American public will find itself in an echo chamber, where the only fiction to which people

have access is fiction that confirms, or at least does not challenge, the idea that the world is full of the perverse, malicious, and morally aberrant. A fearful populace is a manageable populace, not in terms of its passivity, but in terms of its tendency to react predictably--sometimes violently--against anything it that has been framed for it as evil.

This dissertation represents, to my knowledge, the first time that someone has raised problems with the use of literature to illustrate philosophical theories of evil, the first time that the role of elemental evil in the structural development of long-form high fantasy has been acknowledged, and the first time that someone has looked at the relationship between ethics and how evil is presented--or not--across several works in a subgenre of fantasy.

One of my hopes is that this work will encourage those who set out to write about evil to end their heavy reliance on fictional examples. Granted, this is done far more often with realistic fiction than with fantastic fiction, but as Adena Rosmarin notes, even realistic fiction is based not on a similitude of life, but on creating a set of impressions that the reader participates, through the act of interpretation, in making lifelike.⁹⁵⁰ Although authors are certainly permitted to have real insight into why people do harm to each other, that their work is not reality, or a depiction of reality, should never be forgotten.

Further, I hope that fantasy writers who engage with depictions of evil in their work will at least entertain the issues I have raised here, and consider the extent to which fiction shows us not the world in front of us, but the world as we imagine, or fear, or hope it to be.

⁹⁵⁰ Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985), 17-18.

There are real and pressing injustices in the world; in the attempt to think about real suffering and real harm, the dragons are a distraction.

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Appendix

What follows is an appendix I created in 2013 and 2014, from photographs taken during two research trips to England, Wales, Cornwall, and Scotland in October 2010 and April 2011. I hoped to capture something of the interplay between rural, urban, and industrial spaces, with particular reference to its impact on Tolkien's work. Unfortunately, technical difficulties left me unable to edit the finished product. The result is that I have had to reproduce the appendix using screenshots, so the following pages not only may have suffered some loss of quality, but also preserve some text and design choices that I would not make now. I have omitted pages that seemed poorly constructed or irrelevant, and included the remainder, in some cases re-ordering them.



A fence frames a worker at a London park.

In October 2010 and April 2011, I travelled to the UK to see what remained of the industrial wastelands that inspired Tolkien's depiction of Mordor. Although the wastelands themselves are largely gone, several museums preserve England's industrial heritage, and the history of the communities that participated therein.

While travelling, I also gained a powerful sense of what Tolkien was fighting to preserve, and a new appreciation of the urban/rural dichotomy as it manifested in England. I began to understand why people would value the country over the city, even as I grasped what kind of environment privileging one over the other produces.

In North American cities, density tends to be the sign of a healthy neighbourhood. Density means easy walkability, high pedestrian traffic, and a vibrant community. Lower density, such as is found in many suburbs, necessitates the use of a car, discouraging pedestrian traffic and dampening street life. Popular culture treats even affluent suburbs as polite and well-manicured consumerist wastelands. Less affluent suburbs, where the poor are all but cut off from services, amenities, and the life of the city tend to have crime rates elevated by desperation, boredom, and alienation.

In the United Kingdom—as in other European countries—the pattern is somewhat different. English town centres were established for pedestrians, and density tends to be high, even in small towns. However, when towns expanded beyond what a person could comfortably walk, people who lived near the centres would have been confined there unless they were wealthy enough to afford some sort of conveyance. Moreover, poorer areas typically suffered from overcrowding and inadequate sanitation, and, in areas such as the Black Country, air and water pollution. Under these circumstances, it is possible to see how a city, even a relatively healthy one, might feel like a trap.

Even now, the urban environment in the United Kingdom stands in sharp contrast to rural environments, in ways that I have difficulty articulating, but that I hope will be evident in the following pictures. Although I am not saying that the urban/rural divide is absolute in the United Kingdom, or even more absolute there than it is in North America, if one has been primed by life or by reading to see the country in those terms, one will find sufficient material for reinforcement.



Population density in Britain is higher, even in small communities. To a North American tourist, the effect is charming, but it is easy to imagine that someone who could not travel would find it claustrophobic.

Top left: Llandudno in October, when most of the businesses that cater to tourists are closed for the summer, leaving a business' mascot (inset) looking unsettling rather than quaint. Top right: A main street in Oxford. Middle left: The main street of Marazion, a small town just outside of Penzance. Middle right: Penzance, complete with irate shopkeepers (inset). Bottom: Two views of Exeter's town centre.





Above: Stoke-on-Trent, a loose collection of cities also known as the Potteries and united by their reliance on the ceramics industry, has a dense, almost claustrophobic downtown core. Below: Harrogate, by contrast, is a vacation spot for the rich, and distinguishes itself by having a treed park at its core.



Above: Roman ruins in the heart of Chester. Above left: Dundee, Scotland, presents a wall of buildings. Right: The core of Glasgow is a paved square. However, at the nearby Gallery of Modern Art, Glaswegians have seen it as their civic duty to enliven the statue of Wellington.





Cardiff, the largest city in Wales, is an industrial city working hard to remake itself as a tourist destination.

Top: The core of the city boasts both new buildings and old ones. Left: The boardwalk at Millennium Stadium. Below: The Cardiff Millennium Centre by Cardiff Bay is a half-hour bus ride from the downtown core. Bottom left: Industrial sites are still in abundance, particularly the closer one gets to the water. Bottom right: The grounds of Cardiff Castle, one of the few instances of green space that I saw here.





In the Cornish village of Mousehole, just outside of Penzance, density is high and streets are narrow, but the effect is picturesque rather than claustrophobic. My pedal broke here, and when I went into a shop for duct tape to fix it, I was told, "We don't have duct tape, dearie, we're not that sort of town."





Below: The ruins of a Roman settlement in Manchester. The fort and three outbuildings were in use from 70 CE to 410 CE. The statue of the sheep (right) is new.





Manchester struck me as relatively healthy and vibrant, compared to the nearby, depressed Birmingham. Above left: A Victorian building houses a market. Above middle: Wrought iron artistic flourishes decorate a modern walkway by the river.



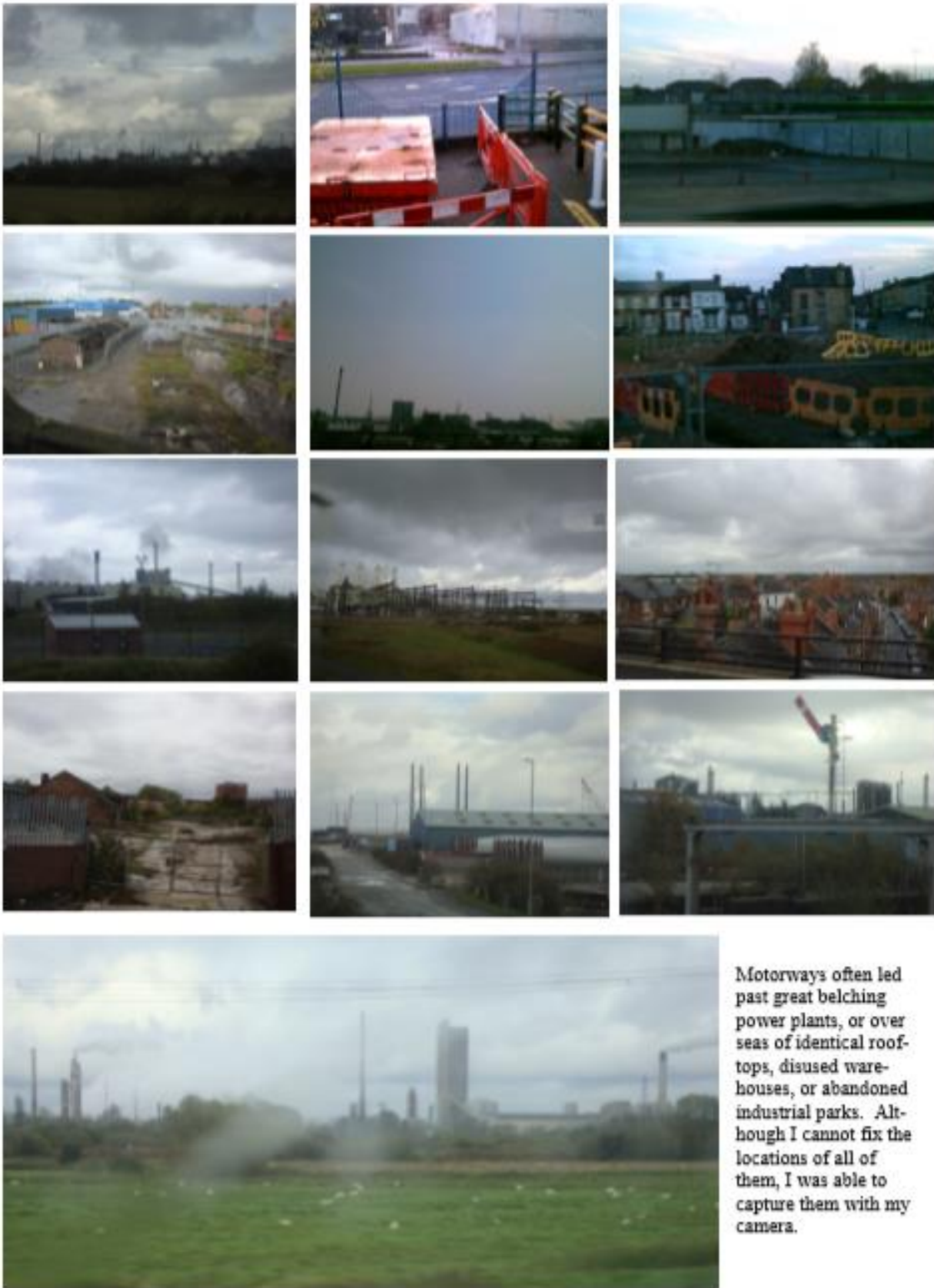
The city of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne has been populated since Roman times, but architecture and public spaces had a flavour that I was beginning to recognize as Victorian industrial: great ornate buildings, many of them originally railway hotels, dominated the main streets, which were overshadowed by cyclopean railroad bridges.

Castle Garth (bottom, second from left), built in 1080 over the ruins of a Roman ford, is the new castle that gives Newcastle its name. (Similar eponymous attractions were not in evidence in Cornwall or, mercifully, Liverpool.)

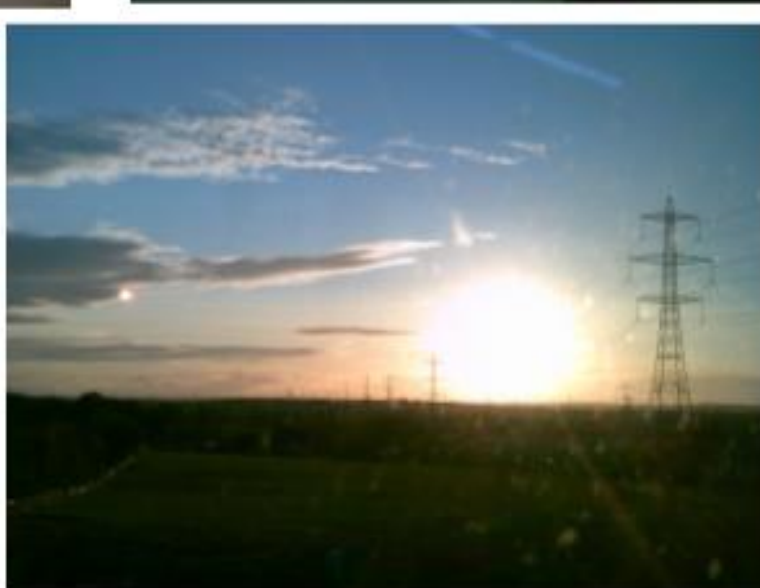




While some buildings in downtown Newcastle were strictly utilitarian, others were decorated with artistic flourishes characteristic of the Victorian age. Note, for example, the nude figure in gold leaf atop the clock (top right), and the stylized sun on a cornice (centre).



Motorways often led past great belching power plants, or over seas of identical rooftops, disused warehouses, or abandoned industrial parks. Although I cannot fix the locations of all of them, I was able to capture them with my camera.





Geevor Tin Mine, just outside of St. Just, Cornwall, was a working tin mine from 1911 until it was closed in 1990. When it was being prepared for re-opening as a museum, a Victorian-era shaft was discovered, and tours are now conducted down this shaft. Our tour guide was a former miner named Ernie. He told us of the perils of tin mining—radon gas, suffocating darkness, and wandering home across the Cornish countryside in sodden clothing. He also told us that if the mine reopened tomorrow, he would return to it in a heartbeat.



Above: House marks identify which smelting house processed the tin. Typical Cornish symbols were the pelican, the lamb, and the flag. Left: Two different styles of the cages that took men into the mines. The one on the left is the older of the two; the one on the right was used in the nearby Levant mine in the 1960s, and held four men and their equipment. Our tour guide said that quarters were extremely close, but miners were accustomed to such conditions.









This is the Dry, a room built in 1935 so that miners could change out of their wet and dirty work clothes and hang them on warm steam pipes to dry, instead of walking home in them. When the mine closed in 1990, the miners left many of their personal effects, just as they would have if they were returning next shift, and a sign enjoins museum patrons to respect these items. There was something haunting about the rows of abandoned coats, shirts, and boots.

Next page: The mill at Geevor.







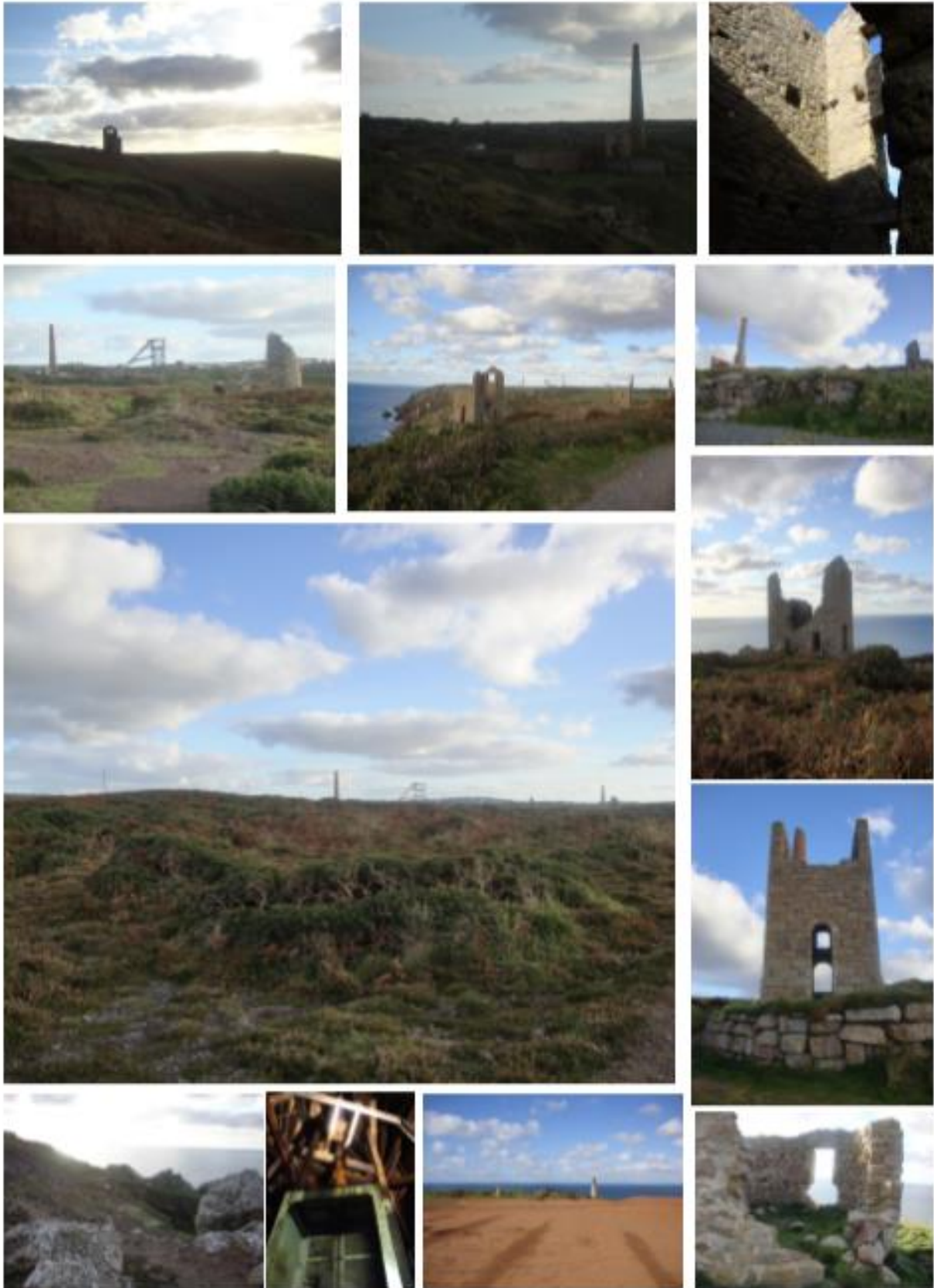
Left, right, and lower right: The sampling house, where core samples are kept and analyzed. Below: The blacksmith's forge.



Right: Geevor offers tours of Wheal Mexico, a shaft that was worked two centuries ago and rediscovered when the mine was being turned into a museum. Below: An example of the rock face that miners would have worked on. Below right: This closet-sized space just off the main shaft would have functioned as a sort of break room in the eighteenth century. Note, atop the crate, the replica of a Cornish pasty.









Mining was once a major industry in Cornwall, and the remains of smokestacks and wind-er houses line the coast. The Levant Mine and Beam Engine and Botallack are two others. Time appears to make all ruins picturesque,







Dolaucauthi Gold Mine was initially a Roman gold mine, and retains the original Roman drains. It was reopened in the nineteenth century, but closed just before World War II and was bequeathed to the National Trust. It is a strange combination of the industrial and the picturesque.





The north of England is plagued by poverty and unemployment. Its museums read partly as an attempt to reclaim the recent industrial past, partly as a way for northerners to insert themselves into a national narrative that leaves them out, and partly as a way of creating jobs.

The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester was perhaps the largest of the city museums I visited, boasting a dizzying array of industrial machines and exhibits.



Since privatisation, the number of customers and the profits have risen. The number of people employed by British Gas has fallen.

Top: The MOSI buildings from the outside. Above left: A room holds hundreds of vast machines. Middle right: A mural graces one of the buildings. Lower middle right: Museums are supposed to be politically neutral, but sometimes a careful factual statement is in order. Right: Old sewer tunnels are incorporated into an exhibit on Manchester's sewers through the ages.



The Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life is in Coatbridge, the former industrial heart of Scotland, between Glasgow and Edinburgh.



Top right: The entrance to Summerlee, which was once an ironworks. Top and middle right: Iron gates pay tribute to industrial workers. Above middle: Various machines are arranged along tram tracks, and patrons can ride one of several retired models of tram, some over a century old. Above right: A sculpture marks the entrance to Summerlee. Below: The museum houses C.R. Stanley's 1853 painting Gartsherrie By Night.



The Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, near Birmingham, acknowledges the harsh conditions that industrial workers endured. Boards posted around the museum's main building bore the following quotations, evocative of Mordor:

"It was but a few weeks ago I was travelling by a night train through that district on the borders of Staffordshire and Warwickshire known in the neighbourhood as 'the black country', and black enough it is...the horizon wears a glowing belt of fire, and every object from your own immediate neighbourhood, away to the furthest stretch of vision, is robed in the self-same fiery garb. The Black Country!" - Rev. Arthur Mansell, in Mansell, Alliance Weekly News, November 1857.

"...interminable villages, comprised of cottages and ordinary houses. They are not arranged in a continuous street, but are interspersed with blazing [sic] furnace, heaps of burning coal in process of coking, piles of iron calcining, forges, pit banks, and engine chimneys." - Fifth Report of the Mining Commission 1843"

"Black by Day and Red by Night....cannot be matched for vast and varied production by any space of equal radius on the globe." - the Anglican Council on Birmingham, 1868

"A dense cloud of pestilential smoke hangs over it forever, blackening even the grain that grows upon it; and at night the whole region burs like a volcano spitting fire from a thousand tubes of brick..." - Thomas Carlyle, 1824

"...in no other part of England is the work of human extermination effected in so short a time as in the district surrounding Dudley." - William Lee, Health Inspector's Report, 1852



Above: The exterior of the Black Country Living Museum. Lower right: A collage depicting the construction of the museum. Below: Manufacturing was also a source of community pride. This room displays some of the goods made in the communities that comprised the Black Country. Inset: The Accles and Pollock Filigree, a piece of art made from 8050 pieces of steel tubing and exhibited at the 1939 World's Fair in New York.





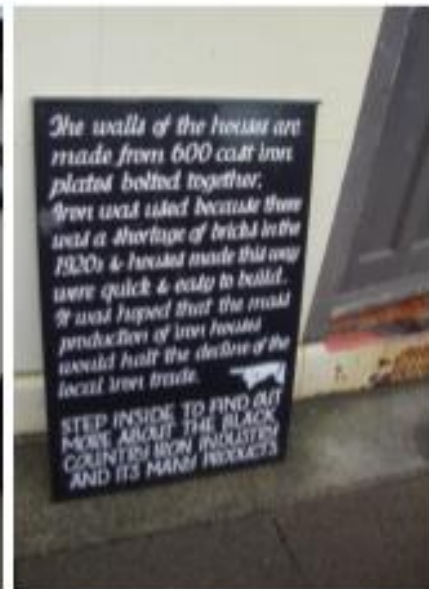
The Black Country Museum also has shops and rides, but the desolate industrial scenes staged around the perimeter using old materials and decommissioned equipment quietly work to undermine a triumphalist narrative of industry, and to associate it rather with ugliness, pollution, and decay.







The limekilns at the Black Country Living Museum were constructed in 1842, and used until the 1920s. The canals at the base, used to transport goods and materials in the days before the proliferation of railways, connect to Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Tunnels were narrow so that barge operators could lie on their backs and "walk" their crafts along with their feet.



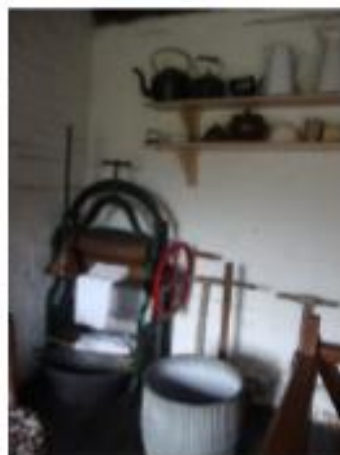
In the 1920s, Birmingham experimented with making houses out of cast-iron plates, to serve the twin functions of creating demand for iron and creating affordable housing for the poor. However, cast iron houses were unbearably hot in the summer, and while they provided hours of wholesome amusement for stone-throwing children, this pursuit was very noisy for the inhabitants. One of these houses stood at the Black Country Living Museum, staffed by volunteers. The back showcased other examples of ironwork.





Top left: Pitt's Cottage peeks out from behind the trees. Top middle: The garden patch. Top right: At the back of the cottage was a pig sty and a place for storing coal.

Pitt's Cottage is a restored workers' cottage at the Black Country Living Museum. A volunteer told me that, lacking electricity and indoor plumbing, it was nonetheless lived in until quite recently. I think I was supposed to be shocked by the poverty of these surroundings, and the primitive arrangements. Instead, I was captivated by the degree to which people who spent most of their waking hours working, and had next to nothing to spend, were able to make their living space beautiful.



Above left: The kitchen was sufficiently equipped to provide the meal replicated on the table (above). Above right: The kitchen also contained a washing machine, and there was a rack for drying clothes near the fireplace of the main room. Right: The only artificial light source was a paraffin lamp. Below: The cottage gave the impression of being well appointed and cozy, despite the lack of amenities. The lace on the shelves (below, middle) is made of artfully cut newspapers.





Top row: The interior of a back-to-back, a two-room, two-storey duplex in which families slept in shifts. Second row left: A chain shop. Second row right: The town cinema. Third row: A nail forge. Bottom: A replica of the Newcomen Engine, the world's first steam engine, originally built in 1712.







The Devonshire countryside, near Killerton Estate, I found the south of England very different from the north. There seemed to be more amenities for tourists, and if unemployment and fear of juvenile delinquency were as severe here, it was better concealed.



St. Michael's Mount, near Penzance in Cornwall, is a former monastery that became first a fortress and then a great house before being donated to the National Trust. Among its claims to fame are its exquisite gardens.



After a steady parade of heavy machinery, bleak industrial lands, and urban decay, Accrington was intended to be a respite: a side trip to the birthplace of a favourite musician of mine, who had worked on a farm and praised the village's natural beauty. I was thus bewildered to find a community of 70 000, extensively paved and illustrative of Cronon's thesis. The people, however, were extremely friendly.

Right: Accrington's town hall. I arrived on the eve of the Lancashire Food Fair, and as a foreigner, received special attention. Below: After a walk downtown, I took a city bus in order to cover more area. The driver noticed me taking pictures, and alerted me to good views.





Tolkien lived near Sarehole Mill in his youth, and used to play there and in nearby Moseley Bog with his brother, Hilary. It was the inspiration for Sandyman's Mill in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, one of the few positive depictions of technology.

The mill was closed in 1919 and fell into disrepair. Tolkien was part of the effort to rescue and restore it in the 1960s. Today it is a museum.

Top: One approaches Sarehole Mill via a treed path, which includes a sculpted tree stump (inset). Right: The chimney. Below: Very few industrial sites can claim to have a garden patch. Bottom: A walkway leads to the mill pond and Moseley Bog, which is now a nature preserve. Next page: The mill displays its workings, as well as a number of related tools and machines, a robust Tolkien exhibit, and archival photographs.

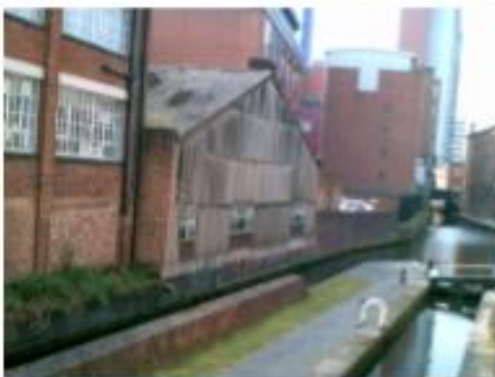






I had a terrible time in Birmingham: Every errand that I tried to run went wrong, and despite it being a city of a million people, the stores closed at six. I fell ill, got very lost, discovered that my hostel was full and had lost my reservation, dropped my camera in the toilet at Starbucks, and left three pints of ice cream on the bus. These experiences coloured my impressions of the city, which were of high unemployment and a pervasive fear of young people.

Top: Birmingham's core was full of solid Victorian buildings. Top right, second row left: Birmingham Cathedral. Centre: A statue of Lucifer in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (lower left). Above: A municipal building is fronted by green space. Left: The Sentinel, a metal sculpture by Tolkien's grandnephew Tim, depicts WWII Spitfires.



Top: Density remained high in Birmingham's satellite communities. Above: Fuel storage tanks. Upper right: Some examples of lower income housing were dispiriting. Right: Natural gas towers. Left, bottom: Birmingham's historic jewelry district. Note the canal.





After leaving Birmingham, I spent some time with my friend Catherine and her family in Sutton Coldfield. Catherine very kindly drove me around to take photos, and when I had had my fill of industrial ugliness, offered to show me some local beauty.



Catherine took me to the village of Berkswell, nestled among trees about fifteen miles outside of Birmingham. The village is named for the well pictured immediately below. *The Bear Inn (top) dates back to the 1500s, and serves an exquisite fish pie. The village green is featured in some of the lower pictures. The church (next page), although small, is even older, dating back to the 12th century.*





Right: St. John Baptist Church and churchyard, with wayside preaching



Cross.



Left: The crypt was the oldest part of the church. A recessed area's low roof was surrounded by boundaries and protected by Plexiglas: archaeologists were slowly uncovering its paint job, which had been done in medieval times.



Catherine also took me to Temple Balsall, a hamlet in the same borough. Its chief attraction was St. Mary's Church, which dates back to the thirteenth century,

Next page, lower left: The organ at St. Mary's was so tall that it was impossible to capture in one shot, or even two. Lower right: I remarked, with some surprise, that the finials in the choir booth were all different. Catherine replied that they were hand-carved in medieval times, when mass production was neither possible nor desirable.





Additionally, Catherine took me to the Clent Hills about ten miles from Birmingham. I had never heard of them, but they proved to be very popular with locals. They afforded spectacular views for many miles. Catherine said that it was likely that Tolkien would have come here, and moreover, that at the time he would have been able to see countryside on one side of him, and the soot and smoke of the Black Country on the other—a land that he loved, marred by an area that was black and blasted.









After Birmingham and the Black Country, Oxford University, with its beautiful medieval buildings and spots of carefully cultivated idyllic green space, would have seemed a haven for Tolkien.

Previous page: The lofty stone spires, willowy streams, and manicured gardens of Oxford. Above: The Eagle and Child, fondly called "The Bird and Baby," was the meeting place of the Inklings, a group of writers that included J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Owen Barfield. Although it has been bought up by a franchise, the pub still boasts a wall dedicated to Tolkien and Lewis, and a quite good summer pudding. Right: Tolkien's grave at Oxford. The stone refers to Tolkien as "Beren" and his wife Edith, who predeceased him, as "Luthien," after characters in Tolkien's invented mythology. Fans have taken it upon themselves to leave gifts and artwork, and in some cases, to advertise websites.



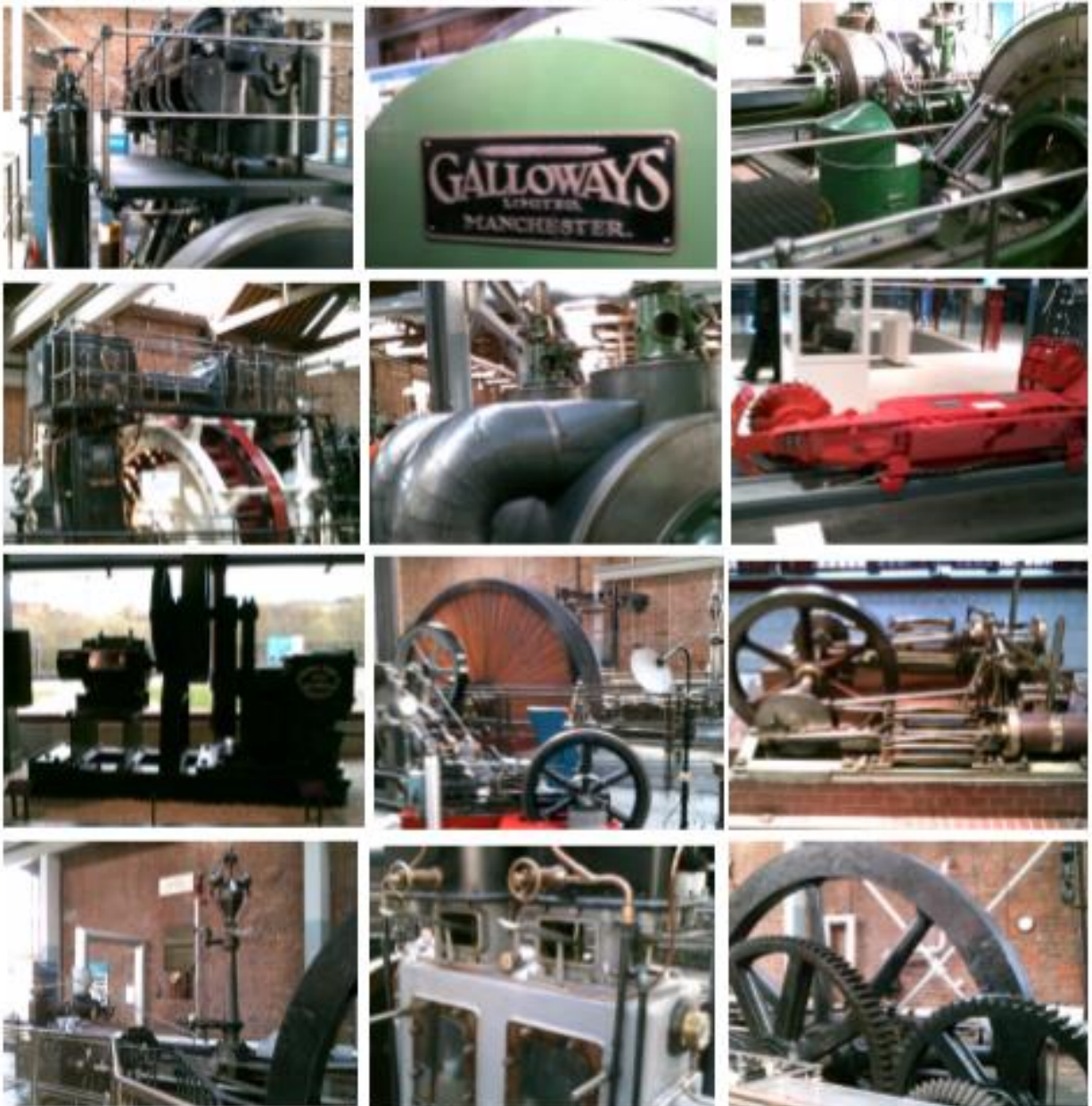


On two research trips, I visited no fewer than twelve museums. The following pictures show a selection of the machines on display there. The bulk of the pictures are from the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, and the Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life in Coatbridge, Scotland.

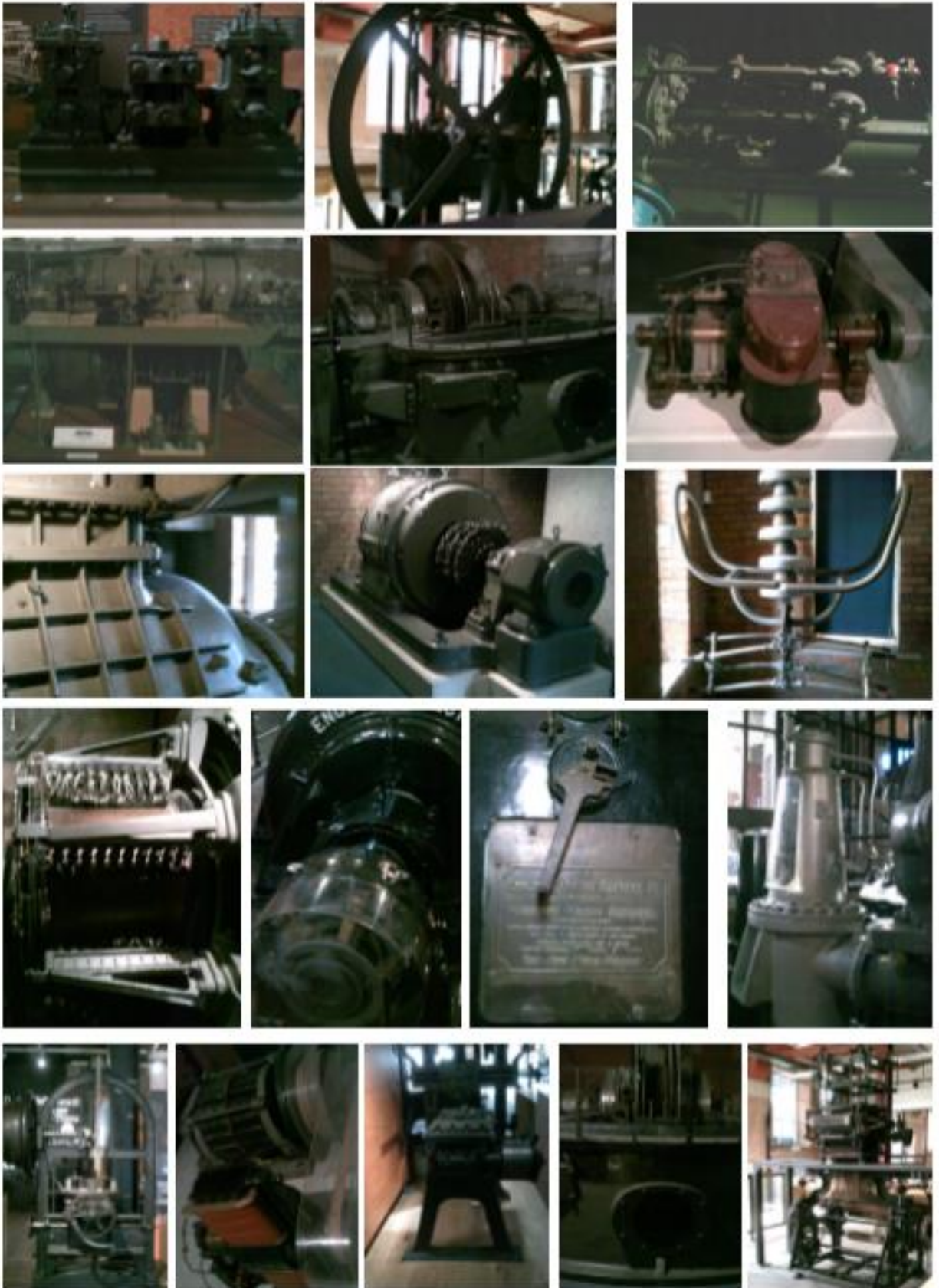




The machines were fascinating as aesthetic objects. At MOSI, I began to fancy that they were grotesque many-limbed creatures. This may have been sleep deprivation—I had spent the previous night stranded in a bus station in Liverpool—but the impression returned at Summerlee, no doubt shaped by expectation.











Above: On display at Summerlee, a Tropenas converter, used in the production of steel, hunches like a great beast, toothless maw agape.



Display credits for pages 521-526:

All photographs were taken by me in April 2011.

Page 521

Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (all)

Page 522

Top row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Newcastle Discovery Museum, Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry.

Second row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (all three)

Third row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life

Fourth row: Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry

Fifth row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (all three)

Page 523

Top row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life, Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life

Second row: Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life

Third row: Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry

Fourth row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (all three)

Fifth row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (both)

Page 524

Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (all)

Page 525

Top row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (all three)

Second row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Sarehole Mill

Third row: Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life (all three)

Fourth row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life

Fifth row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life

Page 526

Top row: Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life, Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life

Second row: Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life

Third row: Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life (all four)



After sleeping in a different city every night for fourteen nights, and seeing enough heavy machinery to last a lifetime, I fled north to Inverness, and spent a few days in this quiet, beautiful city.



After two weeks of town centres and industrial museums, an excursion to the east side of Loch Ness was a balm.

